AT THE TURN OF the YEAR, ESSAYS & NATURE THOUGHTS from the Writings of FIONA MACLEOD

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AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR ESSAYS & NATURE THOUGHTS

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AT THE TURN OF



ENATURE THOUGHTS

THE YEAR, ESSAYS



BY FIONA MACLEOD



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THE IMMORTAL HOUR

By Fiona Macleod. Sm. 4to, on handmade paper, with large margins, 3s.6d. net. It is the first published edition of this work, and contains much of the finest work of Fiona Macleod.

ILLUSTRATIONS

from paintings by

H. C. PRESTON MACGOUN, R.S.W.

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THE IONA BOOKS

Iona's lonely isle, Where Scotland's kings are laid. James Grahame,

Unto this place, albeit so small and poor, great homage shall yet be paid, not only by the kings and people of the Scots, but by the rulers of barbarous and distant nations with their people also. In great veneration too shall it be held by the holy men of other Churches.

St Golumba.

This, dear children, is my last advice to you—that you preserve with each other sincere charity and peace.

St Columba.

In this little island a lamp was lit whose flame lighted pagan Europe. . . . Here Learning and Faith had their tranquil home. . . . And here Hope waits.

To tell the story of Iona is to go back to God, and to end in God. Fiona Macleod.

HANNAH C. PRESTON MACGOUN, R.S.W.





HANNAH C. PRESTON MACGOUN, R.S.W.

T SEEMS FITTING THAT a note of remembrance should, as it were, italicise the last illustrations to which Miss Preston Macgoun lent her facile brush and fine imagination. The more so as her pictures have frequently awakened the spirit of friendship in many who have never had the pleasure of looking into her face. This was, indeed, a not unimpressive feature in her art. It is the same, of course, with literature and music; but of the many writers and musicians who appeal to our sense of beauty how few there are who seem to pass through the gate of admiration and come with hands outspread, demanding, and gaining, something like a personal affection from us.

Miss Hannah Clarke Preston Macgoun, who passed from us on August 20th, 1913, was the youngest daughter of the late Rev. R. W. Macgoun, M.A.,

of Morningside Parish Church, Edinburgh. In her younger days she was gold medallist of the Edinburgh School of Arts; and studied also to excellent purpose under Mr Robert MacGregor, R.S.A. From the very beginning she was an exceedingly enthusiastic worker, and devoted to her art. Her pictures were much admired as they appeared at the Exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Academy, the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, and the Society of Scottish Artists. Perhaps it is not too much to say that highly as her art was thought of at home it was still more esteemedabroad. In Continentalgalleries her works invariably found themselves well placed; while in Munich, particularly, she commanded a ready sale, having rarely ever known the experience, so dreaded by artists, of having canvases returned unsold.

Although never enjoying a formal

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art-training on the Continent, Miss Preston Macgoun spent some considerable time at Dresden and Berlin, and also visited Holland, where she was received in a manner she never forgot by Josef Israels, who, much interested in her work, continued to correspond with her from time to time long after her visit. The veteran *genre* painter, who had always a kindly feeling for Scottish art, expressed himself in terms of admiration regarding the way in which she handled her paint without employing body colour.

In 1903 Miss Preston Macgoun was elected a member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours. She was also a member of the Society of Scottish Artists. Among her best-known pictures are 'Come unto Me,' a fairly large painting in which the Christ regards, with inclined head and wide-spread arms, a number of separate

groups of deftly-drawn children, scattered at His feet like flowers: 'Hands of Healing'; 'The Linen Press'; 'The Broken Toy,' and 'Bairnies Cuddle Doon,'-an effective reproduction of which is at present obtaining a gratifying popularity. Mention may also be made of her last exhibits at this year's Royal Scottish Academy Exhibition— 'The Shell,' representing a child with wondering face, dreaming over the 'murmurs and scents of the infinite sea,' and 'Escape,'-an accomplished little study, almost porcelain-like in purity and clearness of colour, depicting a child finding its way down the stepsout into the big, unknown world. This latter picture is one of many in which she shows so convincingly her deep understanding of children. In a large number of these she reveals with unerring touch the trembling apprehensions, the delicate reserve, the miniature trials

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that seem to rend life apart, and upset and end for the moment a child's whole small life—minor deaths, indeed, that carry in them some subtle hint of the greater Translation.

Other woman-painters may boast, perhaps, of a greater technique; none can claim a subtler appeal. Mr Kipling, it has been said—not over elegantly— 'gets inside the skin' of the men and women he depicts. The artist, who sealltoo-early death we are now lamenting, went much deeper than the skin-as, of course, Mr Kipling himself does. It is not, as has been hinted, a matter of mere technique. There is much that carries us farther than that, for the spirit of the subject is unerringly rendered, and the appeal is invariably to the affections. Her paint carries the eye beyond itself; it is, as it were, a transparency through which mind and heart shine. The words of Charlotte Brontë, in describing Polly

in 'Villette,' come to me: 'This was not an opaque vase of material, however costly, but a lamp chastely lucent, guarding from extinction, yet not hiding from worship, a flame vital and vestal.'

In nearly all Miss Preston Macgoun's work there is a spiritual touch that makes itself felt. Behind pigment and pencil line there dwells a brooding sympathy; a 'sober colouring' came to one who, with Wordsworth, had, in her own simple way, 'kept watch o'er man's mortality.' Particularly is this so in her pencil drawings, and most notably in those appearing in what are now so widely known as the 'Rob Lindsay' booklets. Beginning with 'Rob Lindsay and His School' the series embraced, in time, five books of reminiscences. which were ultimately brought together in one handsome volume in which the anonymous writer at last declared himself. To this reprint Miss Preston

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Macgoun contributed a delicately drawn title-page and a portrait of the venerable author. Well might one critic exclaim: 'Happy is the man who can count on having his written words embodied in such lines of tender and pathetic beauty.' There cannot, indeed, be many instances of so complete a union between writer and artist-moving together so harmoniously to one fine issue. The work of Mr William MacGillivray and Miss Preston Macgoun is thus an achievement-unambitious if you will, but gentle, and sweet, and softly penetrating-which recalls, and finds a fresh application in the phrases of Shelley and Tennyson-'The voice and the instrument' and 'Perfect music

Among other interesting book-illustrations mention may be made of Miss Macgoun's share in 'Pet Marjorie'—the dainty drawings in which it is difficult

unto noble words.'

to overpraise—and 'Rab and His Friends.' Others are 'Jeems the Doorkeeper and other Essays'; 'The Five Little Miss Deacons,' by Lady Beatrice Kemp; 'Little Foxes,' by Mrs Katharine Burrill, and 'The Gold Thread,' by Dr Norman Macleod. In the illustration of such books as 'The Gift of Friendship' she awoke a deeper note.

There was unmistakably in her nature a strain of mysticism. In illustration of this I may be permitted to quote from aletter received from her in August last year. I had expressed my warm admiration of the manner in which she had gathered together on the title-page of Mr MacGillivray's 'Memories' vignettes of the varied personages we know so well in the 'Rob Lindsay' books. She always accepted praise with a gentle dignity that was peculiarly her own. 'I am very glad,' she wrote, 'that you like the title-page so much. It came

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very easily to me, and it seemed almost fortuitous the way the characters came together. The light round Rob's head was only meant to centralise and focus the group, but it falls in with the idea one has of Rob as a suffering saint and this his aureole. Then the little fellow below, who, of course, is the hero ... with the pet lammie, makes one think, by his attitude of the beloved Apostle leaning on His breast, and of the little St John with his traditional lamb; while just below him is 'The Guid Book' on Little Janet's lap, and one says unconsciously to oneself: 'Behold the Lamb of God." Although these fancies did not obtrude themselves when she was in the act of drawing, we see that no sooner do the figures come together than she readily reads into them the spiritual suggestion that never lay very far from her thoughts. Admirers of her work will recall her fondness for

the averted face—of which examples are to be found in this volume. It is not to be thought for a moment that her reason for so frequently rendering the face in this way was because it provided an easy escape from the drawing of details. Rather was it because she knew well the added wistfulness; the spell of the sunset or the starry skies; the hint of higher things that associated themselves with a gaze that is not earthward but in love with the farther horizon. The appeal to the imagination is all the finer and the deeper because the features which are hidden from our view are facing what is only dimly known to us. Something of all this, indeed, Tennyson surely felt when he depicted his Pilot as one with a face which was to remain veiled, or averted, until the Bar was crossed. A veiled prophet has always had a large following. The stamp of what we are is on everything

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we do, and could we but recognise and read the legend we should assuredly find it there. Miss Preston Macgoun's friends knew well not only that she was an insatiable reader but that her instinct for what is best in literature was quick and sure. No doubt, behind her art, nay in it, all this was potent, and gave to it a quality it could not otherwise have obtained. Moreover, paints are mixed with *heart* as well as 'With brains, sir'!

Of the illustrations in this book there is little need to say anything. They speak for themselves. One, indeed, 'June'—gathers to itself a pathetic interest in the eyes of the writer of these paragraphs. A few months before the artist's death we were speaking of the thoughts that had come to her in seeking to give Joy a suitable embodiment. 'Do you know,' she said, 'from all I can gather I conclude that the skylark must

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be the perfect image for me to use.' I reminded her that not only Shelley but George Meredith also had sung of the lark in this sense, and added that, doubtless, she was right in her choice. Turning to me with inexpressibly wistful and yearning eyes, she softly said: 'Do you know I have never heard the lark sing'—a reference (quite unusual with her) to the gift of hearing which had been almost wholly denied to her.

He that hath found some fledged bird's nest may know,

At first sight, if the bird be flown; But what fair well or grove he sings in now, That is to him unknown.

And yet—and yet, thinking of how she spent her days in companionship with the inner life of the children she has depicted for our pleasure in so many vital and beautiful ways, one recalls Francis Thompson's almost grotesquely dignified address to his Godchild—with its golden lines here and there

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-and ventures to apply his words to the illustrator of this book. Telling the child not to seek for him by-and-bye 'Among the bearded counsellors of God,' he added:

'Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven.'

JOHN HOGBEN.





ESSAY ONE AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR



ESSAY ONE AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR

HENONE HEARS OF 'the dead months,' of 'dead December' and 'bleak January,' the best corrective is to be found in the coppice or by the stream-side, by the field-thicket, in the glens, and even on the wide moors if the snow is not everywhere fallen, a coverlet so dense and wide that even the juniper has not a green spike to show, or the dauntless bunting a clean whin-branch to call from on the broomieknowe. Even the common sayings reveal a knowledgehidden from those to whom winter is 'a dead season'... and it is a continual surprise to find how many people believe that from the fall of the leaf or the first sleet and snow, till the thrush doubles and trebles his note in the February wetshine, that bird and insect and all green life have gone, that all Nature is dead or asleep. Thus, for example, 'as keen

in the hearing as a winter-plover' must have been uttered, when first said, by a watcher of the multiform bird-life of our winter-fields and fallow lands, one who knew that the same drama of life and death is enacted in midwinter as in midspring or midsummer, a drama only less crowded, less complex and less obvious, but not less continual, not less vital for the actors. Who that has watched thepee-witsseeking wormson ploughed lands at midwinter, and seenthem poise their delicate heads and listen for the phantom rustle of a worm in this clod or under yonder fallow, while the greedy but incapable seamews, inland come from frost-bound coasts or on the front of prolonged gales, hear nothing of 'the red people' and trust only to bulk and fierce beak to snatch the prey from hungry plover-bills . . who that has seen this can fail to recognise the aptness of the saying, 'as keen in the hearing as a

winter-plover'? Who that has watched the ebb and flow of lark-life, resident and immigrant; the troubled winterdays of the field-travellers (as the familiar word 'fieldfare 'means) and the wandering thrushes; the vagrant rooks, the barn-haunting hoodie; the yellow-hammer flocks and the tribes of the finch; the ample riverside life, where heron and snipe, mallard and moor-hen, wren and kingfisher, and even plover and the everywhere adaptable starling are to be found with ease by quick eyes and careful ears: who that has seen the sudden apparition of the bat, or the columnar dance of the ephemeridæ, or the flight of the winter-mothalong the dishevelled hedgerows; or who that, besides the mistletoe and the ivy, the holly and the fir, the box and the late-flowering clematis, and many other of the green and flowering clans of the forest and the garden, has noted the midwinter-blooming shep-

herd's purse, healing groundsel, bright chickweed, and red deadnettle, can think of nature as lifeless at this season? When amid the rains and storms of December an old gardener, instead of saying that spring was on the move, remarked to me that "twill be starling days soon,' he gave voice to a truth of observation as impressive as it is beautiful. For often December has not lapsed before the mysterious breedingchange of the Vita Nuova, the New Life that spreads like a flowing wave so early in the coming year, will begin to be obvious on the dun-hued lapwing, on the inland-wandering gull, and even on one or other of the small 'clan of the bushes' more dear and familiar to us. On none, however, is the change so marked as on the blithe starling, surely the bird of cheerfulness, for he will sing (does he ever cease that ever-varying call or flute or whistle of his?) when the

lark cannot rise in the polar air, when the missel-thrush will not throw a challenge on the wet wind, and long before the most jubilant great-tit in the forest will ring his early tinkling bell under leafless boughs. For, even at Christmastide, though rarely perhaps quite so early, the dark bill will suddenly yellow, and a green and purple sheen will come over the russet plumage. Already Nature has looked northward again. And, when she looks, there is at once a first movement of the infinite sweet trouble of the New Life once more. The Creative Spirit is come again from the sunways of the South. "Twill be starling days soon"—what is that but a homely way of saying that the old year has not lapsed before the new year has already stirred with the divine throes of rebirth. 'The King is dead: Long live the King!' is the human analogue. There is no interreg-

num. The cuckoo may have fled before the swallow, the landrail before the wild swan, but during the grev ebb of autumn ten thousand wings have rustled in the dawn as the migrants from oversea descend at last on our English and Scottish shores. A myriad host may have fled at the equinox, or lingered till the wet winds of the west and the freezing blasts of the north swept them from November: but on those east winds from Norway and the Baltic, from Jutland and Friesland, on those south winds leaping upward from the marshes of Picardy and the Breton heathlands and from all of the swarm-delivering South behind, on those south-west gales warm with the soft air of the isles of the west, and wet with the foam over lost Ys and sunken Lyonesse, what an incalculable host has come hitherward. Like great fans, the invisible pinions of the Bird-God, that Winged Spirit whom a Finn-

ish legend images in continual suspense at the Crossways of the Four Winds, beat this way and that: so that when already the lament of the wild-geese in storm-baffled flight from the South ulules in our norlanddawns, clouds of larks are gathered like dust from the North-Sea lands, and are blown upon our shores, a multitude of thrush turn westward, the rook and the hoodie rise on the Danish wind, and yonder shadow drifting over the woods of Norway is none other than ten thousand fieldfares whose congregation will soon be spilt like rain upon our fields and pastures.

When is the turn of the year? We have certainly not to wait till the misselthrush calls down the wind on the moist south-wester that comes in February. The changing seasons are indifferent to our calendars. Autumn may burn the lime and chestnut while Summer is still in her glory; Summer may steal back

upon us through the September haze, or even after we have heard the dry rustle in the woods of October. We are familiar with the return of halcyon days when St Luke's Peace follows the wind Euroclydon, or when St Martin's summer gleams like a quiet sunset on the stormy brows of Winter. In mid-December the gnat may still be seen spinning her dance by the hedgerow, the warmthloving bat maystill wheel through silent afternoon dusks, the robin will pitch his blithe song from holly to holly, the hedgesparrow will chase the winter moth, the chaffinch will challenge the marauding tit. In January, when the snow-lids open and the blue is seen, a lark will spray his sudden music from far up in the pale azure, and as the long notes tinkle and the interwoven song falls down the blue invisible ways, we almost imagine that sky-glimpse to be the very face of spring.

Thus we have to wait for noday on which to note from the calendar that the New Year is come, or on which to exclaim that Winter is gone and Spring has arrived. A day may come, in February, perhaps, when, suddenly, one will realise, as after sleep one realises one is awake, that the hands of the South are in the woods, that the eyes of the South are looking into the white sleep of blossom and flower, that the breath of the South has awakened love, has stirred music in the hearts of all the clans of song. But if we had not ourselves been asleep we should not have waited thus long for the exquisite surprise. We should have known the divine conspiracy by which the North and South are lovers, and the West comrade to the East. The conspiracy of the eternal passion by which power desires power, and dominion lusteth after dominion: so that all the effort of the North is to touch the lips of the

South, all the dream of the East is to reach the sunset-gardens of the West. We should have known, when out of December frost or January snow the redbreast thrilled a canticle of joy, or the russet moth sought his wingless love in windless flame-set twilights, that the Grey Lover already felt the breath from those ardent lips. We should have realised that when across the snow silence the fieldfares no longer edged southward, that when on the upland-pasture thelapwing began his bridal change and in the bare orchard the starling began to glisten as though he had bathed at the edge of the rainbow, or to wonder, in some ice-set mirror, at his dun beak now grown yellowas the sheltered crocus he knows of under the garden yew . . . we should have realised that while this darkbrowed barbarian from the Northslept, the fair woman of the South had passed smiling by, and kissed him as she passed.

The breeding-change that may be seen even before Christmas, the January stir that becomes so obvious a week or so, or any day, after the New Year is come, here and now we are at the turn of the year. By mid-January, even, here and there, the song-thrush and the missel may have begun to build, and even the great-tit's bell may tinkle in the coppice or wind-spared russet oak-glade. Already the snowdrop and the Christmasrose, the green-white aconite and the pale winter-iris are become old acquaintances: many a primrose may have adventured in shy retreats: any day a wandering minstrel will spill a tinkle of music from among the first yellow spray of hazel catkins, the hedgesparrow may unloosen song under the early-opening woodbine-buds, the corn-bunting may crack his fairy-hammer or the wren try his new-year flute among the yellowing gorse: any day, at the sight of the first

nomad daisies or the first gay vagrant dandelion, the yellow hammer may become a lover and a poet. It is this unchanging 'any-day' element that redeems even the longest and dreariest midwinter; the sense of the ever-moving ichor in the eternal veins; the inward exultation at the ever-quickening and ever-slowing, but never-ceasing fans of life and death.

Yesterday, rain-fog; to-day, frost-mist. But how fascinating each. How vast and menacing the familiar oaks looked, leaning gigantic over dim lapsing hedgerows. How phantom-like and processional, the elms stealing into view one after the other; the birches disclosing tresses wet with dews from the secret woods they are gliding from to regain the secret lands beyond the misty river where I can hear the mallard call, like a sudden tocsin among the falling towers and silent avalanches of Cloud-land.









It is desolate here, where I stand.

'Cinnidh feanntag's a ghàradh 'N uair thig faillinn'san ròs'

'Nettles grow in the garden, While the roses decay.'

A long way off yet till the wood-thrush rings his falling chime from the April-Tree or French-Broom, as the laburnum is called in some parts of the Highlands. I know a wood where a great Bealaidh Fhrangach sleeps, to awake months hence in sun-gold beauty. The wood-thrush will be its flute. Already I have to-day cut a slip from a gardenlaburnum, for a friend who wants 'a flute of the April-Tree' (feadan na Craobh Abraon)... for there is no timber better for the whistlewood of the bagpipe than this. And what more fit for the Strayed Pan, if perchance he follow the Phantom call in the Hills of the North? But see . . . the mist has gone like a haze from blue water. I hear starling-music

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over yonder in the Talamh nan Ramh, as Ossian calls the Country of the Woods. The Flute of the April-Tree, and snow at my feet! 'The Flute of the April-Tree': it has the yellow and white magic of spring in it.





II THE AWAKENER OF THE WOODS



II THE AWAKENER OF THE WOODS

HE SPIRIT OF SPRING is abroad. There is no one of our island coasts so lone and torlorn that the cries of the winged newcomers have not lamented down the wind. There is not an inland valley where small brown birds from the South have not penetrated, some from Mediterranean sunlands, some from the Desert, some from the hidden homes on unknown isles, some from beyond the foam of unfamiliar shores. Not a backwater surely but has heard the flute of the ouzel, or the loud call of the mallard. The wren, that sweet forerunner of 'the little clan of the bushes' as we say in Gaelic, clann bheag' nam preas, the robin, the mavis, the merle, have been heard in every coppice and wildgrowth from the red combes of the winding Dart to the granite-ledges by the rushing Spey. From the last Cornish upland 39

to the last brown moor on the Ord of Sutherland the curlew and the lapwing have wheeled with wailing cry or long melancholy flutelike whistle. The gorse, whose golden fires have been lit, has everywhere heard the prolonged sweet plaintive note of the yellow-hammer. From the greening boughs the woodpeckers call.

The tides of Blossom have begun to flow. The land soon will be inundated. Already a far and wide forethrow of foamisflungalong the blackthorn hedges. Listen... that chaffinch's blithe song comes from the flowering almond! ... that pipit's brief lay fell past yonder wild-pear! In the meadows the titlarks are running about looking in the faces of the daisies, as children love to be told. On the fenlands and mosses the windy whimper of the redshank is heard like the cry of a phantom: and like a 'bogle,'too, is the perturbing drumming

THE AWAKENER

of the snipe falling swiftly on sloping wings back to the marsh.

The shores, the meadows, the uplands, on each there is a continual rumour. It is the sound of Spring. Listen ... put your ear to the throbbing earth that is so soon to become the green world: you will hear a voice like the voice which miraculously evades in the hollow curves of a shell. Faint, mysterious, yet ever present, a continual rhythm. Already that rhythm is become a cadence: the birds chant the strophes, flower and blossomand green leaf yield their subtlerantiphones, the ancient yet ever young protagonist is the heart of man. Soon the cadence will be a song, a pæan. The hour of the rose and the honeysuckle will come, the hour of the swallow hawking the grey gnat above the lilied stream, the hour when the voice of the cuckoo floats through ancient woods rejoicing in their green

youth, that voice which has in it the magic of all springs, the eternal cry of the renewal of delight.

True, one may as yet more universally see the feet of Spring, or the blossom-touch of her hands, in the meadows and by the shores, than in the woods. She passes by the hedgerows or along the pastures, and her trail has the sheen of gold. Do not the celandine and the flaming dandelion, the pale cowslip and delicate crowsfoot, the jonguil and daffodil, the yellow of the broom and the bee-loved gorse, everywhere show it? She goes by the upland meadows, and touches the boughs of the wild-apple or leaning pear, stoops by the quince or the wild-cherry, and the white foam of the miraculous wind that is in the hollow of her hand is left upon the branches. The slim gean at the edge of the woodland catches the spray, the twisted crab is an old woman suddenly become a

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lovely girl cream-white and rose-flusht. Or she goes down the island-shores, or by the brackened coasts of inland lochs, or along the overhanging brows of streams, or where brooks glide between grassy banks; or, facing northward, she wanders where the hill-burn falls from ledge to ledge, or leaps past the outswung roots of mountain-ash or birch, or steals between peaty grasses where the wren has her nest in the pendent bramble and the greenfinch calls across the fern. And wherever she goes the yellow iris is left by her feet, the yellow-white willow-catkins have become musical with a myriad bees, dust of gold has fallen into the milk-white snow of the countless clans of the daisy, tides of an invisible flood have foamed along the hawthorns, the wild crocus has shone like the spear of Pisarr, the buttercup is brimmed with golden wine, and even the kingcup-ingots are melt-

ed in the waters—for whence else can come that flowing gold which is blent with yonder moving emerald that is as the breath of the grass, yonder floating azure as of drowned speedwells, yonder wandering violet, child of shadow and the wind, yonder mysterious phantom of pale mauve which tells that a becalmed cloud-ship drifts on the deeps of heaven.

Nevertheless it is in the woods that the miracle may be more intimately seen. The Presence perchance is not universally abroad so much as immediately evident. A hand touched that larch yonder: for why is it so suddenly green, with a greeness as of a seawave, or as the wet emerald crystal one finds on the sands of Iona, or, rather, with the softer, moister, the indescribable greenness of the rainbow's breast? A foot leaned upon the moss beneath that vast oak, on whose southern slopes the russet leaves

still hang like a multitude of bats along dark ragged cliffs: for why has the cyclamensuddenly burned in a faint flame, there; why has the sky suddenly come up through the moss, in that maze of speed-wells? Who rose, yonder, and passed like a phantom westward? Some one, surely, of the divine race, for the tips of the sycamore-boughs have suddenly burned with a bronze-hued fire. Whowent suddenly down that mysterious alley of dim columnar pines, stirring the untrodden silent ways? For look, the air is full of delicate golden dust. The wind-wooer has whispered, and the pine tree has loved, and the seed of the forests to come floats like summer-dust along the aerial highways.

But what of the Forest-Awakener? Who is he? Her name, is it known of men? Who can it be but the Wind of the South, that first-born of the wooing Year and sweetheart Spring? But what if the

name be only that of a bird? Then, surely, it must be the wood-thrush, or perchance the cushat, or, no, that wandering Summer-herald, the Cuckoo! Not the skylark, for he is in the sunlight, lost above the pastures: not the merle, for he is flooding the wayside elms with ancient music of ever-young love: not the blithe clans of the Finch, for one and all are gypsies of the open. Perchance, then, the Nightingale? No, he is a moonworshipper, the chorister of the stars, the incense-swinger before the altars of the dawn: and though he is a child of the woods, he loves the thickets also. Besides, he will not come far north. Are there not deep woods of silence and dream beyond the banks of the Tyne? Are there no forest sanctuaries north of the green ramparts which divide Northumbriafrom the glens of Tweed and the solitudes of the shadowy Urr? Are there no inland valleys buried in sea-sounding

woods beyond the green vale of Quair? Alas, the sweet Songmaker from the South does not think so, does not so dream. In moon-reveries in the woods of Surrey, in the starry serenades along the lanes of Devon, in lonely nocturnes in the shadowy groves of the New Forest, he has no thought of more vast, more secret and impenetrable woods through which move mountain-airs from Schiehallion, chanting winds from the brows of the Grampians: he has no ancestral memory of the countless battalions of the red pine which throng the wilds of Argyll or look on the greyshoreless seas of the west, those green pillars which once covered the barren braes of Balquhidder, the desolate hill-lands of the Gregara and, when the world was young, were wet with the spray of the unquiet wastes wherein are set the treeless Hebrides.

No, in the north at least, we cannot

call then ighting ale the Forest-Awakener. In truth, nowhere in our land. For he comes late when he comes at all. The great awakening has already happened. Already in the south the song-thrush, the dandelion, the blackthorn-snow are old tales: far in Ultima Thule to the north-west the gillebride has whistled the tidings to Gaelic ears, far in Ultima Thule to the north-east the Shetlander has rejoiced in that blithest thicketsignal of spring, the tossed lilt of the wren.

It is of the green woodpecker I speak. We do not know him well, most of us: but then most of us are alien to the woods. Town-dwellers and homestayers know little or nothing of the secret signals. It is only the obvious that they note, and seldom read in the great Script of Nature anything more than the conventional signature of certain loved and familiar names and tokens.









It was in the Forest of Fontainebleau I first heard the green woodpecker called bythis delightful name, the Awakener of the Woods, le Révellieur de la Forêt. My French friend told me it was not a literaryname, as I fancied, but one given by the foresters. And how apt it is. In the first weeks of March-in the first week of April, it may be, as the scene moves northward—there is no more delightful, and certainly no more welcome, sound than the blithe bugle-call of the green woodpecker calling through the woodsfor love, and, afterlong expectant pauses, hearing love call back in thrilling response, now a flute-note of gladness, now a challenging clarion-cry. True, whether in the vast forest of Fontainebleau or in our northern woods, the woodpecker is not so readily to be heard in the inward solitudes. He loves the open glades, and commonly the timbered park-land is his favourite re-

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sort. Still, save in the deepest and darkest woods, that delightful rejoicing note is now everywhere to be heard fluting along the sunlit ways of the wind. It awakes the forest. When the voice of the woodpecker is heard it is the hour for Nature to celebrate her own Ides of March. Elsewhere the song-thrush and the skylark have been the first heralds. Even in the woods the missel-thrush may have flung a sudden storm of song out on the cold tides of the wind swaying the elm-tops like dusky airweed of the upper ocean. But, in the gladesthemselves, in the listening coverts, it is the call of the green woodpecker that has awakened the dreaming forest.

And what an ancient old-world tale Picus could tell. For, in the long ago, washe not Picus theantique Italiot god. A forest-god he was, son of ancient Saturn, and himself the father of that beautiful being of the woods, Faunus.

Andhowfar he wandered from Thracian valley and Sabine oak-grove... for in that far northern Finland, which to the Latins was but an unknown remote waste under the star Septentrion, he and his son reappear, though now his name is Tapio and Faunus is become Nyyrikki...

'O Nyyrikki, mountain-hero, Son of Tapio of forests, Hero with the scarlet headgear, Notches make along the pathway, Landmarks upward on the mountain, That the hunter may not wander.'

Still does Nyyrikki, or Pikker as he was called by the northmen long before the *Kalevala* was wrought into Finnish runes, make notches along the pathways of the woods, still the huntsman on the hillside sees his signals on the oakboles. Perhaps to this day the Esthonian peasant offers in his heart a prayer to Pikker the woodpecker-god, god of thunder and storm, so god too of the

glades and fields where these can devastate—a prayer such as that which Johann Gutsloff, a Finnish author of the seventeenth century, cites as the supplication of an old Esthonian farmer: '... Beloved Pikker, we will sacrifice to thee an ox with two horns and four hoofs, and want to beg you as to our ploughing and sowing that our straw shall be red as copper and our grain as yellow as gold. Send elsewhere all thick black clouds over great swamps, high woods, and wide wastes. But give to us ploughmen and sowers a fertile season and sweet rain.'

In Gaelic lands many an old name has been dropped from common use, because thus associated with some shy and yet never-far divinity, and so too the Finn and the Esth ceased to call the woodpecker Pikker (aword so strangely like Picus) and thus it is that now the peasant knows him only as Tikka. With

the Romans, Picus the god was figured with a woodpecker on his head, and all of us who have read Pliny will remember the great store laid by the auspices of Rome on the flight and direction and general procedure of this forest-traveller. Recently a sculptor, I know not of what nationality, exhibited in Paris a statue of the Unknown Pan, and on his shoulder perched a woodpecker. Was this a reminiscence, or ancestral memory, or the divining vision of the imagination? I have some fifty pages or more of MS. notes dealing with the folklore and legendary names and varying ways and habits of the fascinating woodlander, from his Greek appearance as Pelekas, the axe-hewer (Aristophanes calls him the oak-striker)-whence no doubt 'Picus' and 'Pikker' and 'Peek' and the rest-to Latin Tindareas, mortal father of Leda, to the White Woodpecker, the magic bird of mediæval leg-

end, to 'der olle Picker,' the horrible laughing god of human sacrifice in ancient Prussia, to Pak-a-Pak, 'the lost lover of the woman in the oak,' in a strange tale I heard once in the woods of Argyll. But of all this I would recall to-day only that tradition of the woodpecker which describes her (she is a wise-woman in the folk-tales) as knowing where the spring-wurzel grows, that mysterious plant of Pan and the sun with which one may open the faces of cliffs with a breath, as did the deermother of Oisìn of the Songs, with which too one may find the secret ways of Venusberg and behold in calculable treasure.

For hark!.. Pak-a-Pak, and the long cry of love! It is answered from the listening woods! Here must 'the springwurzel' grow... here, for sure, are the green palaces of Venusberg, here, at very hand, are the incalculable treas-

ures of the awakened Forest.





III SUMMER CLOUDS



III SUMMER CLOUDS

OR ONE WHO HAS LIVed so much among the hills and loves the mountain solitude it may seem strange to aver that the most uplifting and enduring charm in Nature is to be found in amplitude of space. Low and rolling lands give what no highlands allow. If in these the miraculous surprise of cloud is a perpetual new element of loveliness, it is loveliness itself that unfolds when an interminable landrecedes from an illimitable horizon. and, belonging to each and yet remote from either, clouds hang like flowers, or drift like medusæ, or gather mysteriously as white bergs in the pale azure of arctic seas.

We are apt to be deceived by the formal grandeur of mountains, by the massed colours and contours of upbuilded heights, whether lying solitarily like vast sleeping saurians, or gathered in harmonious, if tumultuous, disarray.

There is a beauty that is uniquely of the hills. The mountain lands have that which no lowland has. But in that company we shall not find what the illimitable level lands will afford, what inhabits the wilderness, what is the revelation of the desert, what is the lovely magic of the horizons of the sea. By the sombre reaches of the Solway, in the fenlands of East Anglia, in the immensity of the great bog which cinctures Ireland, in the illimitable lowland from Flanders to the last brine-whitened Frisian meadows, I have seen a quality of aerial beauty that I have not in like loveliness elsewhere found. Who that in mid-ocean has long watched the revelation of distance and the phantasmagoria of cloud during serene days, or from island shores looked across limitless waters till the far blue line seemed lifted to the purple-shadowed bases of leaning palaces, can think of an excel-

ling loveliness? Who that has seen the four-fold azure, in east and west, in north and south, over the desert, and watched the secret veils of a single pavilion of rose-flusht cumulus slowly be undone, till the vision is become a phantom, and the phantom is become a dream, and the dream is become a whiteness and stillness deep-sinking into fathomless blue, can forget that the impassive beauty of the wilderness is more searching and compelling than the continual miracle of wind-swept Alp and cloudshadowed highland; that it has, in its majesty of silence and repose, that which is perpetual on the brows of Andes and does not pass from Himalaya?

Perhaps in sheer beauty of pictorial isolation clouds are most lovely when viewed above sea horizons, from shores of islands, or promontories, or remote headlands. In the South this beauty is possibly more dream-like, more poign-

antly lovely, than in the North. Certainly, I have nowhere known cloud beauty excelling that in the Mediterranean and Ionian seas, viewed from the Spanish coast, from the Balearic Isles, over against the mountain-bastions of Sardinia and Corsica, from the headlands of Sicily, where Ithaka and Zante are as great galleys in a magic ocean, where for weeks at midsummer the wine-dark waters are untroubled between the cliffs of Hellas and the sands of Alexandria. Perhaps. It is difficult to say of any region that there beauty is more wonderfully revealed than elsewhere. It comes, and is present, and is upgathered; as the wind, that has no home, that the shaken reed knows, that crumbles the crests of ancient hills; as the rainbow, which is the same aerial flame upon Helicon, upon Ida, on the green glen of Aghadoe, on the steeps of Hecla in the Hebrides, that gives

majesty and wonder to the village green, and delivers mystery on the horizons of the frequented common. It is like light, whose incalculable arrivals are myriad, but which when most stedfast is most dreamlike, a phantom: as moonlight on the mysterious upturned face of great woods; or as when, on illimitable moors, the dew glistens on the tangled bent and pale flood of orchis where the lapwings nest; or in golden fire, as when at the solstice the sorrel in the meadows and the tansy in the wastes and the multitude of the dandelion are transmuted into a mirage of red and yellow flame; or in rippling flood of azure and silver, when the daysprings loosen; or in scarlet and purple and chrysoprase, when the South is as a clouded opal and the West is the silent conflagration of the world. There is not a hidden glen among the lost hills, there is not an unvisited shore, there is not a city swathed in

smoke and drowned in many clamours, where light is not a continual miracle, where from dayset to dawn, from the rising of the blue to the gathering of shadow, the wind is not habitual as are the reinless, fierce, unswerving tides of the sea. Beauty, and Light, and Wind: they who are so common in our companionship and so continual in mystery, are as one in this—that none knows whence the one or the other is come, or where any has the last excellence or differs save in the vibration of ecstasy, or whither the one or the other is gone, when the moment, on whose wings it came or on whose brows it stood revealed, is no longer Eternity speaking the language of Time, but the silence of what is already timeless and no more.

It has been said, less wisely than disdainfully, that the chief element of beauty is destroyed when one knows









the secret of semblance. Clouds, then, are forfeit in loveliness when one knows the causes of their transformation, their superb illusion? Not so. Has the rose lost in beauty, has she relinquished fragrance, for all that we have learned of her blind roots, the red ichor in her petals, the green pigment in her stem, her hunger that must be fed in coarseearth, her thirst that must be quenched in rain and dew, her desire that must mate with light? Is the rainbow the less a lovely mystery because we know that it is compact of the round, colourless raindrops such as fall upon us in any shower? Is the blue of an unclouded sky the less poignant for us if we know that the sunlight which inhabits it is there, not the yellow or red or suffused white which we discern, but itself an ineffable azure; that, there, the sun itself is not golden or amber or bronze, but violet-blue?

I remember it was complained once

of something I wrote . . . in effect, that cloud was the visible breathing, the suspended breath of earth . . . that the simile was as inept as it was untrue. None who knows how cloud is formed will dispute the truth in similitude: as to disillusion, can that be 'unpoetic' which is so strange and beautiful a thing? The breath of a little child born in the chill dawn, the breath of old age fading into the soon untroubled surface of the mirror held against silent lips, the breath of the shepherd on the hills, of the seamen on dark nights under frost-blue stars, the breath of cows on the morning pastures, of the stag panting by the tarn, the breath of woods, of waters, of straths, of the plains, of the brows of hills, the breath of the grass, the breathing of the tremulous reed and the shaken leaf . . . are not these the continual vapour of life; and what is cloud but the continual breath of our most deep and ancient

friend, the brown earth, our cradle, our home, and our haven?

If any reader wish to feel the invisible making of the cloud that shall afterward rise on white wings or stream like a banner from mountain-bastions, let him stand on the slopes of a furrowed hill in this midsummer season. He will then feel the steady, upflowing tide of the warm air from the low-lying glens and valleys, a constant tepid draught, the breath of the earth. It will not be long before the current which shook yonder rose-flusht briar, which swayed these harebells as foam is blown, which lifted yonder rowan-branch and softly trampled this bracken underfoot, is gathered by scaur and sudden corrie to the sheer scarps of the mountain-summit, to be impelled thence, as a geyser is thrown from an imperious fount, high into the cold and windy solitude. There it may suddenly be transmuted to an incalcul-

able host of invisible ice-needles, and become cirrus; to float like thistledown, or to be innumerably scattered in wisps and estrays, or long 'grey-mares'-tails,' or dispersed like foam among vast, turbulent shallows. Or it may keep to the lee-side of the mountain-summit, and stretch far like a serrated sword, or undulatingly extend like a wind-narrowed banner, covering as a flag the climbing armies of pine and boulder and the inscrutable array of shadow.

Cirrus... what a beauty there is in the familiar names: what beauty of association for all who love the pageant of cloud, and, loving, know somewhat of the science of the meteorologist. It is not alone in this: memory and imagination are alike stirred by the names of the three other or of the four main divisions of Cloud—the Cumulus, the Stratus, the Nimbus. From the grey and purple of earthward nimbus to the salmon-pink

bastions of the towering cumuli, those unloosened mountains of the middle air, those shifting frontiers of the untravelled lands of heaven, and thence to the dazzling whiteness of the last frozen pinnacles of cirrus, all loveliness of colour may be found. Neither brush of painter nor word of poet can emulate those apparitions of gold and scarlet, of purple and emerald, of opal and saffron and rose. There every shade of dove-brown and willow-grey, every subterfuge of shadow and shine, can be seen.

The cloud-lover will know that these four great divisions are but terms of convenience. There are intervening children of beauty. Betwixt the earthheld, far-reaching nimbus and the climbing cumulus, whose forehead is so often bathed in the rarest fires of sunset, is the cumulo-nimbus. Between the cumulus and the stratus, whose habitual grey robe can be so swiftly made radiant in 69

vellow and orange and burning reds, is the strato-cumulus: a sombre clan in the upper wilderness, heavy with brooding rains, moving in dark folds, less persuaded of the great winds which may drive the as silent seeming stratus, some ten thousand feet higher it may be, at the lightning speed of the eagle. Between the stratus and cirrus there are the cirro-cumulus and the cirro-stratus. The former is in one form as commonly welcome as beautiful, the familiar 'mackerel-sky,' harbinger of fair weather-in another, it is the soft dappled sky that moonlight will turn into the most poignant loveliness, a wilderness of fleecy hillocks and delicate traceries. The latter is that drift-ice or broken-up snowfield enmassing which is so familiar. Both march from horizon to horizon in ordered majesty, though when they seem like idle vapours motionlessly suspended along the blue walls of heaven

they are rustling their sheaves of frostfire armour, are soaring to more than twenty thousand feet above the earth, and are surging onward with impetuous rush at the rate of from seventy to eighty miles an hour.

I have called them the children of beauty. But these children of cloud are many. In each division, in each subdivision, there is again complex division. In a Gaelic story or poem-saga they are called 'the Homeless Clan.' It is a beautiful name. But they are not homeless whom the great winds of the upper world eternally shepherd, who have their mortal hour in beauty and strength and force, and, instead of the havens and graves and secret places of the creatures of earth, know a divine perpetual renewal.







IV SEA MAGIC



'Manan mil air sloigh . . .'

N ONE OF THE REMOTest islands of the Hebrides I landed on a late afternoon in October a year ago. There was no one on the island except an old man who was shepherd for the fourscore sheep which ate the sweet sea-grass from Beltane till Samhain:* one sheep for each year of his life, he told me, 'forby one, and that will be right between them an' me come Candlemas next.' He gave me water and oatcake, and offered to make me tea, which I would not have. I gave him the messages I had brought from the distant mainland of the Lews, and other things; and some small gifts of my own to supplement the few needs and fewer luxuries of the old islander. Murdo MacIan was grateful, with the brief and simple gladness of a child.

^{* &}quot;Baltane till Samhain": 1st May till Summerend (31st October).

By mistake a little mouth-organ, one of those small untuneful instruments which children delight in and can buy for a few pence, was in my package along with a 'poke' of carvies, those little white sweets for buttered bread dear to both young and old-though even they, like all genuine products of the west, great and small, are falling away in disuse! The two had been intended by me for a small lass, the grandchild of a crofter of Loch Roag in the wester-side of the Lews; but when the yacht put in at the weedy haven, where scart and gillie-breed and tern screamed at the break of silence, I heard that little Morag had 'taken a longing to be gone,' and after a brief ailing had in truth returned whence she had come.

And for the moment neither snuff nor tobacco, neither woollen comforter nor knitted hose, could hold Murdo as did that packet of carvies (for the paper

had loosened, and the sugary contents had swarmed like white ants) and still more that sixpenny mouth-organ. I saw what the old man eagerly desired, but was too courteous and well bred even to hint: and when I gave him the two things of his longing my pleasure was not less than his. I asked him why he wanted the cruit-bheul, which was the nearest I could put the Gaelic for the foreign toy, and he said simply that it was because he was so much alone, and often at nights heard a music he would rather not be hearing. 'What would that be?' I asked. After some hesitation he answered that a woman often came out of the sea and said strange foreign words at the back of his door, and these, he added, in a whinnying voice like that of a foal; came, white as foam; and went away grey as rain. And then, he added, 'she would go to that stroked rock yonder, and put songs against me, till my

heart shook like a tallow-flaucht in the wind.'

Was there any other music? I asked. Yes, he said. When the wind was in the west, and rose quickly, coming across the sea, he had heard a hundred feet runningthrough the wet grass and making the clover breathe a breath. 'When it's a long way off I hear the snatch of an air, that I think I know and yet can never put name to. Then it's near, an there's names called on the wind, an' whishts an' all. Then they sing an' laugh. I've seen the sheep standingtheir forelegs on the slit rocks that crop up here like stony weeds-staring, and listening. Then after a bit they'd go on at the grass again. But Luath, my dog, he'd sit close to me, with his eyes big, an' growling low. Then I wouldn't be hearing anything: no more at all. But whiles, somebody would follow me home, piping, and till the very door,









and then go off laughing. Once, a three-week back or so, I came home in a thin noiseless rain, and heard a woman-voice singing by the fire-flaucht, and stole up soft to the house-side; but she heard the beat of my pulse and went out at the door, not looking once behind her. She was tall and white, with red hair, and though I didn't see her face I know it waslike a rock in rain, with tears streaming on it. She was a woman till she was at the shore there, then she threw her arms into the wind an' was a gull, an' flew away in the lowness of a cloud.'

While I was on the island the wind had veered with that suddenness known to all who sail these seas. A wet eddy swirled up from the south-east, and the west greyed, and rain fell. In a few minutes clouds shaped themselves out of mists I had not seen and out of travelling vapours and the salt rising breaths of the sea. A long wind moved from 81

east to west, high, but with its sough falling to me like a wood-echo where I was. Then a cloudy rain let loose a chill air, and sighed with a moan in it: in a moment or two after, great sluices were opened and the water came down with a noise like the tide coursing the lynns of narrow sea-lochs.

To go back in that falling flood would be to be half-drowned, and was needless too: so I was the more glad, with the howling wind and sudden gloom of darkness and thick rain, to go in to Murdo's cabin, for it was no more than that, and sit by the comfortable glow of the peats, while the old man, happy in that doing, made tea for me.

He was smiling and busy, when I saw his face cloud.

'Will you be hearing that?' he said looking round.

'What was it?' I answered, for I thought I had heard the long scream of

the gannet against the waves of the wind high above us.

Having no answer, I asked Murdo if it was the bird he meant. 'Ay, it might be a bird. Sometimes it's a bird, sometimes it's a seal, sometimes it's a creature of the sea pulling itself up the shore an' makin' a hoarse raughlin like a boat being dragged over pebbles. But when it comes in at the door there it is always the same, a tall man, with the great beauty on him, his hands hidden in the white cloak he wears, a bright, cold, curling flame under the soles of his feet, and a crest like a bird's on his head.'

I looked instinctively at the door, but no one stood there.

'Was the crest of feathers, Murdo?' I asked, remembering an old tale of a messenger of the Hidden People who is known by the crest of cuckoo-feathers that he wears.

'No,' he said, 'it wasn't. It was more 83

like white canna blowing in the wind, but with a blueness in it.'

'And what does he say to you?'

'His say is the say of good Gaelic, but with old words in it that I have forgotten. The mother of my mother had great wisdom, and I've heard her using the same when she was out speaking in the moonlight to them that were talking to her.'

'What does he tell you, Murdo?'

'Well, I thought it might be Mr Macalister, him as was drowned on St Bride's day, the minister over at Uiseader of Harris; I've heard he was a tall, fine man, an' a scholar, an' of great goodness an' fineness. And so I asked him, the second time he came, if may be he would be Mr Macalister. He said no, an' laughed the bit of laugh, and then said that good man's bones were now lying in a great pool with three arches to it, deep in the sea about seven

swims of a seal from Eilean Mhealastaidh, the island that lies under the shadow of Griomaval on the mainland of the Lews.*

'An' at that,' added Murdo, 'I asked him how he would be knowing that.

"How do you know you are a man, and that the name on you is the name you have?"hesaid. An'atthat I laughed, and said it was more than he could say, for he did not seem to have the way of a man an' he kept his name in his pocket.

'With that he touched me an' I fell into an aisling.† And though I saw the red peats before me, I knew I was out on the sea, and was a wave herded by the wind an' lifted an' shaken by the tide—an'a great skua flyin'over saw my name floating like a dead fish an' sank

^{*}Seven swims of a seal. 'A seal is supposed to swim a mile on one side without effort, without twist; and then to change to the other side and swim in the same way the next mile; and so on.

[†] An aisling: i.e. a swoon with remembrance.

to it an' swallowed it an' flew away. An' when I sat up, I was here on this stool before the peats, an' no one beside me. But the door was open, an'though there was no rain the flagstone was wet, an' there was a heavy wetness in the room, an' it was salt. It was like a split wave, it was.'

I was silent for a time, listening to the howling of the wind and the stumbling rush of the rain. Then I spoke.

'But tell me, Murdo, how you know this was not all a dream?'

'Because of what I saw when he touched me.'

'And what was that?'

'I have the fear of it still,' he said simply. 'His arms were like water, and I saw the sea-weed floating among the bones of his hand. And so I knew him to be a morar-mhara,* a lord of the sea.'

^{*&#}x27;Morar (or Morair), a lord, as Morair Gilleasbuig Mhic'Illeathain' (Lord Archibald Maclean).

'And did you see him after that?'
'Yes.'

'And did he say anything to you then?'

'Ves. He said to me after he had sat a long time staring in the fire: "Murdo, what age have you?" An' I told him. I said I would be eighty years come Candlemas. He said, "You've got a clean heart: an' you'll have three times eighty years of youth an' joy before you have your long sleep. An' that is a true word. It will be when the wild geese fly north again." An' then he rose and went away. There was a mist on the sea, an' creepin' up the rocks. I watched him go into it, an' I heard him hurling great stones an' dashing them. "These are the kingdoms of the world," I heard him crying in the mist. No, I have not been seeing him any more at all: not once since that day. An' that's all, Ban-Morar.'

That was many months ago. There is no one on the island now: no sheep even, for the pastures are changed. When the wild geese flew north this year, the soul of Murdo MacIan went with them. Or if he did not go with them, he went where Manan promised him he should go. For who can doubt that it was Manan, in the body of vision, he the living prince of the waters, the son of the most ancient god, who, crested as with snow-white canna with a blueness in it, and foot-circt with cold curling flame-the uplifted wave and the wandering sea-fire-appeared to the old islander? And if it were he, be sure the promise is now joy and peace to him to whom it was made.

Murdo must have soothed his last hours of weakness with the cruit-bheul, the little mouth-organ, for it was by the side of his pillow. In these childish things have we our delight, even those

few of us who, simple of heart and poor in all things save faith and wonder, can, like Murdo MacIan, make a brief happiness out of a little formless music with our passing breath, and contentedly put it away at last for the deep music of immortal things.









V

EPTEMBER: THE VERY name has magic. Inan oldbook, half in Latin half in English about the months, which I came upon in a forgotten moth-eaten library years ago, and in part copied, and to my regret have not seen or heard of since, or anywhere been able to trace, I remember a singular passage about this month. Much had been said about the flowers of 'these golden weekes that doelye between the thunderous heates of summer and the windy gloomes of winter'; of those flowers and plants which bloom in gardens, and those, as the harebell and poppy and late-flowering gorse, which light the green garths of meadow and woodland; as the bryony, which trails among the broken copses and interweaves the ruddy masses of bramble; as the traveller's-joy, which hangs its frail wreaths of phantom-snow along the crests of every hedgerow of beech and

hornbeam. Of the changing colours of the trees, too, the old writer had much to say: of the limes 'that become wan and spotted as a doe,' of the mountainash 'that has its long fingers dyed redd and browne,' of 'the wyche-elme whose gold is let loose on the wind afternightefrosts and cold dawnes.' Nor did he forget that 'greate beautie of mistes' which we all know; and he reached eloquence when he spoke of the apple-orchards and of the wall-fruits of 'olde manor-gardenns'-'the peache that women and poetes doe make the queene of fruites,' 'the rich glowe and savour of the apricock, 'thedelicate jargonell that keepes the sweetes of France in olde warme English gardenns.' Of wild fruit, also, he had dainty words and phrases. Blackberries, 'thedarke-bluebilberry,'thesloe 'whose excellent purple bloode maketh so fine a comfort,' 'the dusky clustres of the hasel,' 'the green-smockt filberte,'









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and so forth. Even upon mushrooms he had words of sun and wind and dew, so lightsome were they, ardent and joyous. with a swift movement—as though writ by one who remembered gathering 'musherooms'in a sun-sweet dawn after a night of heavy dews, in company with another who laughed often in gladness and was dearest and fairest of all dear and fair things. 'Howbeit,' he added. after sorrowing that 'many doe feare these goodly musherooms as poysonis dampeweedes,' 'this dothe in nowise abatethe exceedynge excellence of Goddes providence that out of the grasse and dewe where nothing was, and where onlie the lytell worme turned in his sporte, come as at the shakynge of bells these delicate meates.'

Then, after some old-world lore about 'the wayes of nature with beastes and byrdes' in this month, he goes further afield. 'And this monthe,' he says,

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'is the monthe of dreames, and when there is a darke (or secret) fyre in the heartes of poetes, and when the god of Love is fierce and tyrannick in imaginings and dreames, and they doe saye in deedes also, yett not after midwaye of the monthe; butt whye I know not.'

We hear so much of the poet-loved and poet-sung month of May, and the very name of June is sweet as its roses and white lilies and lavender, that it is become a romantic convention to associate them with 'dreames' and the 'tyrannick' season of 'the god of Love.' But I am convinced that the old Elizabethan or Jacobean naturalist was right. Mayand June are months of joy, but September is the month of 'dreames' and 'darke fyre.' Ask those who love nature as the poet is supposed to love her, with something of ecstasy perhaps, certainly with underglow of passion: ask those in whom the imagination is as a quickening and waning

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but never absent flame: ask this man who travels from month to month seeking what he shall never find, or this woman whose memories and dreams are many, howsoever few her hopes . . . and the chance will be that if asked to name the month of the heart's love, it will be September. I do not altogether know why this should be so, if so it is. There is that in June which has a time-defying magic: May hashers weet affinities with Spring in the human heart: in April are the flutes of Pan: March is stormy with the clarions of the winds: October can be wild with all wildness or be the calm mirror of the passing of the loveliness of the green-world. There is not a month that has not its own signal beauty, so that many love best February, because through her surge of rains appear days of blue wonder, with the song of the missel-thrush tost like spray from bare boughs-or November, because in the 99

grey silence one may hear the fall of the sere leaves, and see mist and wan blueness make a new magic among deserted woods-or January, when all the visible world lies in a white trance, strange and still and miraculous as death transfigured to a briefand terrible lovelinesson the face of one suddenly quiet from the fever of youth and proud beauty. There is not a month when the gold of the sun and the silver of the moon are not woven. when the rose of sunset does not lie upon hills which reddened to the rose of dawn, when the rainbow is not let loose from the tangled nets of rain and wind, when the morning-star and the eveningstar do not rise and set.

And yet, for some, there is no month that has the veiled magic of September.

'The month of peace,' 'the month of beauty,' it is called in many Gaelic songs and tales; and often, 'Summer-end.' I remember an old rann, perhaps still said

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or sung before the peat-fires, that it was in this month God created Peace; again, an island-tale of Christ as a shepherd and the months as sheep strayed upon the hills of time. The Shepherd went out upon the hills, and gathered them one by one, and led them to the fold: but, before the fold was reached, a great wind of snow came down out of the corries, and on the left a wild flood arose, and on the narrow path there was room only, and that hardly, for the Shepherd. So He looked to see which one of the twelve He might perchance save, by lifting it in His strong arms and going with it alone to the fold. He looked long, for all were the children of His Father. Then He lifted September, saying, 'Even so, because thou art the month of fulfilment, and because thy secret name is Peace.' But when he came out of the darkness to the fold, the Shepherd went back between the wild lips of flood and tempest,

and brought to the fold June, saying, 'Because thy secret name is Joy': and, in turn, one by one, He brought each to the fold saying unto each, in this order, 'May, because thy secret name is Love'; 'April, because thou art made of tears and laughter'; 'July, because thou art Beauty'; 'August, thou quiet Mother'; 'October, because thy name is Content'; 'March, because thy name is Strife'; 'February, because thy name is Hope'; 'November, because thy name is Silence'; 'January, because thou art Death'; and at the last, 'December, whom I have left to the end, for neither tempest could whelm nor flood drown thee, for thy name is the Resurrection and the Life.'

And when the tale was told, some one would say, 'But how, then, was September chosen first?'

And the teller would say, 'Because its secret name is Peace, and Peace is the secret name of Christ.'

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It is no wonder the poets have loved so well this month whose name has in it all the witchery of the North. There is the majesty of the hill-solitudes in it, when the moorlands are like a purple sea. It has the freshness of the dewwhite bramble-copses, of the bracken becomerusset and pale gold, of the wandering frostfire along the highways of the leaf, that mysterious breath whose touch is silent flame. It is the month when the sweet, poignant second-song of the robin stirs the heart as a child's gladness among tears. 'The singer of September,' a Gaelic poet calls it, and many will recall the lovely lines of the old half-forgotten Elizabethan poet on the bird.

'That hath the bugle eyes and ruddy breast And is the yellow autumn's nightingale.'

It is strange how much bird-lore and beast-lore lie with September. The moor-cock, the stag, the otter, the sea-103

wandering salmon, the corncrake, and the cuckoo and the swift, I know not how many others, have their tale told or their farewell sung to the sound and colour of September. The poets have loved it for the unreturning feet of Summer whose vanishing echoes are in its haunted aisles, and for the mysterious silences of the veiled arrivals of Winter. It is the month of the year's fulfillings—

'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Close-bosom'd friend of the maturing sun.'

And yet there are other Septembers than the Septembers of memory, than the Septembers of the imagination. For three years past the month has come with rains from the sea and cold winds out of the east and north. The robin's song has been poignantly sweet as of yore, but the dream-glow has been rare upon the hill and valley and in the woods and on the moor-slopes the leaf has hung bannerets of dusky yellow,

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and the bracken burned dully without amber and flamelit bronze. This year, though, there has been some return of those September days which we believe in while yet a long way off, as we believe in May, as we feel assured of June. This last June was truly a month of roses, and in May the east wind slept: but last year the roses trailed along flooded byways, and the east wind nipped bud and blossom through the bleak days of 'the merry month,' and a colourless and forlorn September must have chilled even that 'darke fyre in the heartes of poetes' of which the old naturalist wrote. There have been days of peace this year, and of the whole beauty of Summer-end. In the isles, among the hills, on forest lands and uplands, and by the long plains and valleys of the south, the September blue-which is part a flame of azure and part a haze of the dust of pearls—has lain over land 105

and sea like a benediction. How purple the western moors, what depths of floating violet and pale translucencies of amethyst on the transfigured mountains. What loveliness of pale blue mist in the hollows of quiet valleys; what richness of reds and ambers where the scarlet-fruited ash hangs over the unruffled brown pool; what profuse gold and ungathered amber where the yellow gorse climbs the hillside and the armies of the bracken invade every windy solitude. How lovely those mornings when the dewis frost-white and the gossamer is myriad in intricate interlacings that seem woven of aerial diamond-dust. What peace in that vast serenity of blue where not the smallest cloud is seen, where only seaward the gannet may hang immeasurably high likea winged star, or, above inland pastures, the windhover poise in his miraculous suspense.

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But, alas, only 'days.' It has not been the September of the heart's desire, of the poet's dream. The advance-guard of the equinox has again and again come in force: the grey wind has wailed from height to height, and moaned among the woods. Even in the gardens the wall-fruits have hardly given the wonted rich warmth, though the apples have made a brave show. Yesterday there was a hush in the wind; a delicate frost lingered after a roseflusht dawn; and the inward light came out of the heather, the bracken and the gorse, out of the yellow limes and the amber planes and the changing oaks, and upon the hillside turned the great pine on the further crag into a column of pale gold and made the lichened boulders like the half-sunken gates of buried cities of topaz and jasper and chalcedony. But to-day vast masses of sombre cloud have been swung inland from the At-

lantic, and the gale has the wild mournful sough that we look for in the dark months. It is in the firelight that one must recapture September. It lies hidden in that warm heart, amid the red and yellow flowers of flame: and in that other heart, which, also, has its 'darke fyre,' that heart in whose lands lit by neither sun nor moon are the secret glens where old dreams live again, and where the dreams of the hour are radiant in their new wonder and

ant in their new wonder and their new beauty.





VI AT THE RISING OF THE MOON











VI AT THE RISING OF THE MOON

HE DEW IS HEAVY ON the grass: the corncrake calls: on a cloudy juniper the night-jar churrs: the fhionna or white moth wavers above the tall spires of the foxglove. The midsummer eve is now a grey-violet dusk. At the rising of the moon a sigh comes from the earth. Down the moist velvety ledges of the dark afew far-apart and low-set stars pulsate as though about to fall, but continuously regather their tremulous white rays. The night of summer is come.'

With these words I ended a paper, 'The Coming of Dusk.' There was not space there to speak of other, of so many of those nocturnal things which add so much to the mystery and spell of the short nights of summer: the arrowy throw of the bat, a shadowy javelin flung by a shadowy hand against a shadowy foe; the night-jar, the dusky 113

clans of the owl, moon-rise at sea or among pinewoods, the dance of the moths round certain trees, the faint woven cadence of the wheeling gnatcolumns, the sudden scream of the heron or the wailing of seafowl, or the mournful noise of the moon-restless lap-wing, wind in the grass, wind in the hollows of woods, wind among the high corries of the hills. These and a hundred other sounds and sights fill the summer-darkness; the hill-fox barking at the moonshine, the heather-cock in defiance of alarm, deer panting among the bracken, the splash of herring or mackerel on the moonlit breast of the bay, dogs baying a long way off and from farmstead to farmstead. One could not speak of all these things, or of the hundred more. In the meadows, in woods, on upland pastures, from beech-thicket to pine-forest, on the moors, on the hills, in the long valleys

and the narrow glens, among the dunes and sea-banks and along wave-loud or wave-whispering shores, everywhere the midsummer-night is filled with sound, with fragrance, with a myriad motion. It is an exquisite unrest: a prolonged suspense, to the dayworn as silence is, yet is not silence, though the illusion is wrought out of the multitudinous silences which incalculably intersperse the continuous chant of death, the ceaseless hymn of life.

Everywhere, but far north in particular, the summer night has a loveliness to which the least sensitive must in some degree yield, creates a spell which must trouble even a dulled imagination, as moonlight and the faintest rippling breath will trouble unquickened pools into a sudden beauty. It is a matter of temperament, of mood and circumstance rather, where one would find one-self, at the rising of the moon, in the pro-

longed twilights of summer. To be in a pinewood shelving to a calm sea breakingin continuous foam: or among mountain solitudes, where all is a velvety twilight deepening to a green darkness, till the sudden moon rests athwart one hill-shoulder like a bronze shield, and then slowly is lifted and dissolves into an amber glow along all the heights: or on great moors, where one can see for leagues upon leagues, and hear nothing but the restless crying of the curlew, the screech of a heron, the abrupt unknown cries and fugitive sounds and momentary stealthy rustlings of nocturnal solitudes. Or, again, on a white roadway passing through beech-woods: or on a gorse-set common, with the churring of a nightjar filling the dust with the unknownsurgeand beatin one's own heart: or on the skirts of thatched hamlets, where a few lights linger, with perhaps the loud breathing and trampling of

cattle: or in a cottage-garden, with mignonette and cabbage-roses and ghostly phlox, or dew-fragrant with musk and southern-wood: or in an old manor-garden, with white array of lilies that seem to have drunk moonlight, and damask and tea-rose in odorous profusion, with the honey-loving moths circling from mossrose to moss-rose, and the night-air delaying among tall tickets of sweet-pea. Or, it may be, on quiet sea-waters, along phantom cliffs, or under mossed and brackened rocky wastes: or on a river, under sweeping boughs of alder and willow, the great ash, the shadowy beech. But each can dream for himself. Memory and the imagination will create dream-pictures without end.

Of all these midsummer-night creatures alluded to here or in the preceding article there may be none more allied to poetic association than the nightjar, but surely there is none more interesting

than the owl itself, that true bird of the darkness. The phantom-flight, that silent passage as from the unseen to the unseen, that singular cry, whether a boding scream or a long melancholy hoot or aprolonged too-whoo, how blent they are with one's associations of the warm husht nights of summer. But is not the nightjar also of the same tribe? Fern-owl is a common name; also jarowl, heather-owl. I have heard it called the heather-bleat, though probably that name commonly indicates the snipe. How well I remember from childhood that puzzling riddle

'The bat, the bee, the butterflee, the cuckoo and the gowk, The heather-bleat, the mire-snipe; how many

birds is that?'

I was never 'taken-in' by the first three, but as I had been told or had somehow discovered that the cuckoo was often companioned by the meadow-pipit I thought the latter must be the 'gowk.'

So I guessed 'four,' taking the heatherbleat to be the nightjar: and it was long before I discovered that the answer was two, for only the cuckoo and the snipe were really named.

I wonder how many names the Owl has! Those alone which, like the archetypal name, derive from the old rootword ul (to howl or hoot or screech), must run to some thirty to forty at least, from the Anglo-Saxon 'hule' and later 'ullet' to the familiar 'hoolet' or 'hoolit' or 'howlet,' or, again, the still current south English 'ullud,' 'ullot,' or 'ullyet.' We have many Gaelic names also, as (for the snowy or barn owl) 'cailleachbhan,' the white auld wife, or 'cailleachoidhche,' the night-witch; or (for the tawny owl) 'bodach-oidhche,' the nightbogle; or (for the screech-owl) the onomatopœic 'corra-sgriachaig,' or several termsmeaning 'long-eared' or 'horned'; and three or four designations, either

onomatopœic, as perhaps 'ulacan' (though both in sound and meaning it is the same as the southland 'hooligan'), or adaptations of the Teutonic rootword, as 'Olcadan'or 'ullaid.' The name 'yogle' may be heard along the Lothian, Yorkshire, and East-Anglian coastlands, and is doubtless a "lift" from the Danish 'Katyugle' or 'Katogle': indeed 'catyogle,' 'catogle,' and 'catyool' (with the quaint by-throw 'cherubim)' occur in several parts of England. In Clydesdale I have often heard the horned owl called the 'luggie' (long-ears). Some names with probably only local meaning I do not understand, as for example, the 'Wite' (not the adjective, but possibly the old word for churchyard and even church); the 'padge' or 'pudge' of Leicestershire; the Jack-baker, billywix, and the eastland 'will-a-wix.' (Is this the cry of the young owl awaiting food?) The 'jilly,' which I heard once at

or near Windermere, is probably a corruption of the Gaelic 'gheal' (white), as many north-Celtic names survive in that region. Our commonest name in the Highlands is 'comhachag' (co-achak) probably as onomatopæic a term as 'cuach' or 'cuthag' (coo-ak) for the cuckoo, or 'fitheach' (fee-ak) for the raven. It is said that the longest poem on the Owl in any language is in Gaelic. The Oran na Comhachaig or Song of the Owl was composed by an aged Highland bard named Donald Finlay somewhere about three hundred years ago -about 1590 says one local account, though I do not know on what authority: a rinn Domhnull Mac Fhionnlaidh nan Dan, sealgair 'us bard ainmeil Abrach mu thiomchioll 1590 (done by Donald Finlay of the Songs, the celebrated Lochaber huntsman and poet, in or about 1590). I have again and again heard the second of its sixty-seven—in

another version seventy — quatrains quoted in support of the theory that an owl lives at least a hundred years; some are credited with far greater age:

"S co-aoise mise do'n daraig,
Bha na fhaillain ann sa choinnich,
'S ioma linn a chuir mi romham,
'S gur mi comhachag bhochd na sroine.'

(I am old as the oak...lit. 'the ancientness upon me is that of the oak'... whose mossy roots spread wide: many a race have I seen come and go: and still I am the lonely owl of Srona.)

In every country the owl is a bird of mourning. It is also the bird of night pre-eminently (what a pity the old-English owl-light as a variant for twilight has become obsolete); the bird of moonlight or the Moon; the bird of Silence, of Ruin, of the Grave, of Death. In some places a dead owl is still transfixed to the outside of a door, to avert lightning. Perhaps it is for the same reason that a caged owl is held to be a danger-

ous co-inmate of a house during a thunderstorm. A thousand legends have woven this sombre raiment of associations. though the owl's only distinction from other birds of prey is that it can see in the dark and is nocturnal in habit. It loves solitary places, because there undisturbed, but is not all darkness solitary? In Syria the peasant calls the owl 'the mother of ruins,' which is poetically apt, as is the German 'the sorrowing mother,' but our northern 'night-witch' andthegrim Breton 'soul-harrier' (surely a survival of the Greek idea of the owl as a soul-guide) are unjust to an inoffensive bird whose concern is not with souls and graves and ruins but with rats and mice. A German naturalist has even, I remember, written to prove that the owl is pre-eminently a bird of love, of single-hearted devotion, 'the dove of the night': and there is a Danish poem about' the Silver-Spinner' weaving a

thin invisible web in the dusk wherein to entangle and bring close the hearts of lovers. Old Donald Finlay of the Songs must have had some such idea in his mind when in his Song of the Owl he makes the bird say in effect, 'I may be old and forlorn, but am not to be blamed for that: neither of rapine nor of lies have I ever been guilty: is there a grave anywhere that I have ever violated? and to the mate of my choice have I ever been faithless?'

This name of the Silver-Spinner, however, though often in Germany, Scandinavia, and our own country associated with the poetic legend alluded to, is really a romantic derivative from the ancient connection of the small owl with the Maiden Maid goddess who presided over spinning as one of her foremost womanly attributes. 'The Woman's Bird,' as the small owl is sometimes called, deserves the name, for in

almost every language ancient and modern, except English and Finnish, its name is feminine. The sacred bird of Athens or the Lesbian Nyctimenê is still 'the woman's bird' among the Australian aborigines: Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Icelandic, Vendish, German, French, Hungarian, all afford the same sex-indication. The great white owl, however, is the bird of heroes, wanderers, the night-foray, war, lightning, desolation, solitude, and death. It is said, I know not how demonstrated or traced, that the name Ulysses is but the variant of the Etruscan Ulixé or Sikulian Oulixes, words supposed to indicate the ululation of the owl's cry (in Italy I have heard the name of the sweet and plaintive little aziola or aziolo derived from the same source): and that it was given to the Homeric hero because he was the first to adventure sea-voyaging on moonlit nights, because he too was

a night-wanderer. But unless Ulixé or Oulixes be older than the Greek name, what of Odysseus? In like fashion some speculative philologists derive 'Pallas' from the Turanian owl-name *Pöllö*.

I heard a singular fragment of owlfolklore once on the island of Arran. The narrator said the white owl had seven distinct hoots, but all I need recall here is that the seventh was when the 'Reul Fheasgair' ceased to be the Evening Star and became the 'Reul na Maidne,' the Day-Star. Was this a memory of some myth associating the owl with the otherworld (or darkness or moontide or Night) disclosed everyeve at the opening of the Gates of Dusk?... the time of sleep and dreams, of strange nocturnal life, of silence and mystery, between the soft white fire of the Vesper Star, the star of Labour as the Bretons call it, meaning that with its advent thelong day's labour ceases, and its cold

serenity when it has climbed the ramparts of the mid-summer night, and, as Phosphoros, the Day-Star, Son of the Morning, flashes like a lance-point against the milky onflood of the dawn?





VII WIND, SILENCE, AND LOVE



VII WIND, SILENCE, & LOVE

by a friend desiring more intimate knowledge as to what influences above all other influences had shaped her inward life, answered at once, with that sudden vision of insight which reveals more than the vision of thought, 'The Wind, Silence, and Love.'

The answer was characteristic, for, with her who made it, the influences that shape have always seemed more significant than the things that are shapen. None can know for another the mysteries of spiritual companionship. What is an abstraction to one is a reality to another: what to one has the proved familiar face, to another is illusion.

I can well understand the one of whom I write. With most of us the shaping influences are the common sweet influences of motherhood and fatherhood, the airs of home, the place

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and manner of childhood. But these are not for all, and may be adverse, and in some degree absent. Even when a child fortunate in love and home, it may be spiritually alien from these: it may dimly discern love rather as a mystery dwelling in sunlight and moonlight, or in the light that lies on quiet meadows, woods, quiet shores: may find a more intimate sound of home in the wind whispering in the grass, or when a sighing travels through the wilderness of leaves, or when an unseen wave moans in the pine.

When we consider, could any influences be deeper than these three elemental powers, for ever young, yet older than age, beautiful immortalities that whisper continually against our mortal ear. The Wind, Silence, and Love: yes, I think of them as good comrades, nobly ministrant, priests of the hidden way.

WIND, SILENCE & LOVE

To go into solitary places, or among trees which await dusk and storm, or by a dark shore; to be a nerve there, to listen to, inwardly to hear, to be at one with, to be as grass filled with, as reeds shaken by, as a wave lifted before, the wind: this is toknow what cannot otherwise be known; to hear the intimate. dread voice; to listen to what long, long ago went away, and to what now is going and coming, coming and going, and to what august airs of sorrow and beauty prevail in that dim empire of shadow where the falling leaf rests unfallen, where Sound, of all else forgotten and forgetting, lives in the pale hyacinth, the moon-white pansy, the cloudy amaranth that gathers dew.

And, in the wood; by the grey stone on the hill; where the heron waits; where the plover wails; on the pillow; in the room filled with flame-warmed twilight; is there any comrade that is as

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Silence is? Can she not whisper the white secrecies which words discolour? Can she not say, when we would forget, forget; when we would remember, remember? Is it not she also who says, Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest? Is it not she who has a lute into which all loveliness of sound has passed, so that when she breathes upon it life is audible? Is it not she who will close many doors, and shut away cries and tumults, and will lead you to a green garden and a fountain in it, and say, 'This is your heart, and that is your soul: listen?

That third one, is he a Spirit, alone, uncompanioned? I think sometimes that these three are one, and that Silence is his inward voice and the Wind the sound of his unwearying feet. Does he not come in wind, whether his footfall be on the wild rose, or on the bitter

WIND, SILENCE & LOVE

wave, or in the tempest shaken with noises and rains that are cries and tears, sighs and prayers and tears?

He has many ways, many hopes, many faces. He bends above those who meet in twilight, above the cradle, above dwellers by the hearth, above the sorrowful, above the joyous children of the sun, above the grave. Must he not be divine, who is worshipped of all men? Does not the wild-dove take the rainbow upon its breast because of him, and the salmon leave the sea for inland pools, and the creeping thing become winged and radiant?

The Wind, Silence, and Love: if one cannot learn of these, is there any comradeship that can tell us more, that can more comfort us, that can so inhabit with living light what is waste and barren?

And, in the hidden hour, one will stoop, and kiss us on the brow, when 137

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our sudden stillness will, for others, already be memory. And another will be as an open road, with morning breaking. And the third will meet us, with a light of joy in his eyes; but we shall not seehim at first because of the sun-blaze, or hear his words because in that summer air the birds will be multitude.

Meanwhile they are near and intimate. Their life uplifts us. We cannot forget wholly, nor cease to dream, nor be left unhoping, nor be without rest, nor go darkly without torches and songs, if these accompany us; or we them, for they go one way.





NATURE THOUGHTS
SELECTED BY MRS
WILLIAM SHARP &
ROSELLE LATHROP
SHIELDS

'Who knows what is in a poet's mind? The echo of the wind that was gone was there, and the sound of the rain and the movement and colour of the fire, and something out of the earth and sea and sky, and great pitifulness and tenderness for women and children, and love of men and of birds and beasts, and of green lives that were to him not less wonderful and intimate'

FIONA MACLEOD.

FOREWORD

ture Thoughts has been chosen almost at random from the writings of 'Fiona Macleod,' whose work is not only filled supremely with the joyousness of waters, woods, and mountains, and the deep mysteries of sea and land, but is pervaded by an intense and intimate vision which reaches down to the common heart of Nature, the heart of life that is the heart of all, and reveals glimpses of the secret of Nature—the harmonious unity and eternal beauty which underlies all life.

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The supreme merit of the Greeks is that they knew this law of sympathy which runs through the Universe—a knowledge springing from truth, full of hope—and their enduring charm is that they felt and showed that beauty is the essence of life. And in the Celtic vision there seems a reawakening of the old Hellenic harmony between the eternal

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love of beauty and the passionate longing for truth.

'Fiona Macleod,' represents the Celtic temperament in all its complex charm, mystical depth, and that indefinable something, veiled, exquisite, and sombre, which hovers above the commonplace and illumines the sentiments and passions which so many feel but so few can express.

Not merely to be capable of feeling more profoundly than any other, but to be able also to communicate in a perfect form what one has felt, that is to be among the 'horizon-makers.' This was the great desire of 'Fiona Macleod,' who humbly but proudly wrote:

'A handful of pine-seed will cover mountains with the green majesty of forest, and so I too will set my face to the wind and throw my handful of seed on high.'

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So far as it has been possible to have any arrangement in a little collection of this sort, the aim has been to follow the idea of Man's relation to Nature in all its commonplace forms, but ever immersed in Beauty in its twofold aspect of Joy and Sorrow, swayed by the elemental forces of air and light and water in the moving Seasons, which lead one always on to a realisation of the everchanging changelessness of Time and Eternity.

'Time never was, Time is not.'

R. L. SHIELD



NATURE THOUGHTS BEING SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS FIONA MACLEOD

VERYWHERE WE SEE the life of Man in subservient union with the life of Nature: never, in a word, as a sun beset by tributary stars, but as one planet among the innumerous concourse of the sky. nurtured, it may be, by light from other luminaries and other spheres than we know of. That we are intimately at one with Nature is a cosmic truth we are all slowly approaching. It is not only the dog, it is not only the wild beast and the wood-dove, that are our close kindred. but the green tree and the green grass, the blue wave and the flowing wind, the flower of a day and the granite peak of an æon. . . . We are woven in one loom. and the Weaver thrids our being with the sweet influences, not only of the

Pleiades, but of the living world of which each is no more than a multi-coloured thread: as, in turn, he thrids the wandering wind with the inarticulate cry, the yearning, the passion, the pain, of that bitter clan, the Human.

Truly, we are all one. It is a common tongue we speak, though the wave has its own whisper, and the wind its own sigh, and the lip of man its word, and the heart of woman its silence.

an an

We speak of Mother Nature, but we do not discern the living truth behind our words. How few of us have the vision of this great brooding Mother, whose garment is the earth and sea, whose head is pillowed among the stars: she who, with death and sleep as her familiar shapes, soothes and rests all the weariness of the world, from the waning leaf

to the beating pulse, from the brief span of a human heart to the furrowing of granite brows by the uninterrupted sun, the hounds of rain and wind, and the untrammelled airs of heaven.

SO SO SO

THERE is no leaf of the forest that could not reveal mystery of form, mystery of colour, wonder of structure, secret of growth, the law of harmony; that could not testify to birth, and change, and decay, and death; and what history tells us more?—that could not, to the inward ear, bring the sound of the south wind making a greenness in the woods of Spring, the west wind calling his brown and red flocks to the fold.

es es

WE have forgotten rapture. The communion of life! To breathe once more in a common joy! To feel the brotherhood 149



of life, from the blossom on the bough to the grey silence of old hills; from the least of the blind offspring of the earth to the greatest of the winged children of the four winds; from the wild lives that lurk and are afraid to the fearless lives that openly rejoice; from the stilled lives that do not move, the hill-rock and the sea-caverned coral, to the wild swan of the arctic wave or the swallows that with white breast and purple wing thrid an ever-moving maze from the Hebrid Isles to where the Nile narrows in tufted reed and floating nenuphar. To feelthus, with the thrill of conscious oneness, rejoicingly; as children of one mother, nestlings of one brood; and, thus feeling, to perceive and be at one with the secret springs of the inward life, in caverned thought and image-building dream, and of the life made visible in motion, colour, and form—this would be to know the primitive genius, to be poss-

essed by it, to be of the genii of the morning.

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Lowering skies, with afloating odour of coming rain, already dulled the hill-land.... The wind moved with a heavy lift, here rising, here falling, anon whirling upon itself, so that all the fern and undergrowth in the corries bent one way, or, for a league, the spires of the heather whitened.

High and low, the innumerous hum of insects vibrated on the air. Thus may the hum of the wheeling world be heard of Keithoir, who dreams in the hollow of a green hill unknown of man: or of the ancient goddess Orchil, who, blind and dumb, works in silence at the heart of Earth at her loom Change, with the thridding shuttles Life and Death: or of Manannan, who sleeps under the green wave, hearing only the sigh of the past,



the moan of the passing, the rune of what is to come.

AS AS

A seer had told him of Orchil, the dim goddess who is under the brown earth, in a vast cavern, where she weaves at two looms. With one hand she weaves life upward through the grass; with the other she weaves death downward through the mould; and the sound of the weaving is Eternity, and the name of it in the green world is Time. And, through all, Orchil weaves the weft of Eternal Beauty, that passeth not, though its soul is Change. Notcruel, relentless, impotently, anarchic, chaotically potent, this Master Genetrix. We see her thus, who are flying threads in the loom she weaves. But she is patient, abiding, certain, inviolate, and silent ever. It is only when we come to this vision of her whom we call Isis, or Hera, or

Orchil, or one of a hundred other names, our unknown Earth-Mother, that men and women will know each other aright, and go hand in hand along the road of life without striving to crush; to subdue, to usurp, to retaliate, to separate.

HE had ever been wont to have communion with the powers and sweet influences which are behind the world. Through these he had come to know the mystery of the Spirit of Life. With this Eternal Spirit he held communion in his deep sorrow. It was then that he learned how what is beautiful cannot pass, for beauty is like life that is mortal but whose essence does not perish. In fragrance, in colour, in sweet sound, somehow and somewhere, that which is beautiful is transmuted when suddenly changed or slain.

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The things of the imagination do not die, but change with the changing hours—as the wild parsley and the hyacinth come into the woods at the first flutenotes of April, and were as young last year, or will be under the yet unfallen dews, as they were a thousand years ago, in Arcadian valleys or in the glens of the Gael.

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THEN he remembered the ancient wisdom of the Gael, and went out into the woods. He put his lips to the earth, and lifted a green leaf to his brow, and held a branch to his ear: and he heard that which we do not hear, and saw that which we do not see, and knew that which wedo not know. All the green life was his. In that new world he saw the lives of trees, now pale green, now of wood-smoke blue, now of amethyst: the grey lives of stone: breaths of the

grass and reed:creatures of the air, delicate and wild as fawns, or swift and fierce and terrible, tigers of that undiscovered wilderness, with birds almost invisible but for their luminous wings, their opalescent crests.

TO TO THE

It is in 'the desert,' whether in the wilderness of the unpeopled waste or in that of the mind where the imagination wanders like a lonely hunter on the trail of the obscure and the unknown, that the whisper of Destiny is supremely audible. It is on the eddying air. It is in the sigh of the grass. The green branch whispers it. It is in the brown leaf, on the grey wind.

To go into solitary places, or among trees which await dusk and storm, or by a dark shore: to be a nerve there, to listen to, inwardly to hear, to be at one

with, to be as grass filled with, as reeds shaken by, as a wave lifted before, the wind: this is to know what cannot otherwise be known: to hear the intimate, dread voice; to listen to what long, long ago went away, and to what now is going and coming, coming and going, and to what augustairs of sorrow and beauty prevail in that dim empire of shadow where the falling leaf rests unfallen, where Sound, of all else forgotten and forgetting, lives in the pale hyacinth,

the moon-white pansy, the cloudy ama-

ranth that gathers dew.

In a Gaelic story or poem-saga children of cloud are called 'the Homeless Clan.' It is a beautiful name. But they are not homeless whom the great winds of the upper world eternally shepherd, who have their mortal hour in beauty and strength and force, and, instead of

thehavens and graves and secret places of the creatures of earth, know a divine perpetual renewal.

Just as the waving hand of the sun beckons the white wandering clouds, as a shepherd calls to his scattered sheep, so there is a hand waving to us to press forward.

w w

WE should be cloud-climbers rather than mere mountain-climbers; we should climb to see the heights recede in continual folds of loveliness, and the clouds lift their trailing purple shadows and sail slowly or hang motionless beyond the eternal buttresses.

Is it because the wild-wood passion of Pan still lingers in our hearts, because still in our minds the voice of 157

dreams.

Syrinx floats in melancholy music, the music of regret and longing, that for most of us there is so potent a spell in running waters? We associate them with loneliness and beauty. Beauty and solitude . . . these are still the shepherd kings of the imagination, to compel our wandering memories, our thoughts, our

W W W

In the Beauty of the World lies the ultimate redemption of our mortality. When we shall become at one with nature in a sense profounder even than the poetic imaginings of most of us, we shall understand what now we fail to discern. The arrogance of those who would have the stars as candles for our night, and the universe as a pleasaunce for our thought, will be as impossible as their blind fatuity who say we are of dust, briefly vitalised, that shall be dust

again, with no fragrance saved from the rude bankruptcy of life, no beauty raised up against the sun to bloom anew.

It is no idle dream, this: no idle dream that we are a perishing clan among the sons of God, because of this slow waning of our joy, of our passionate delight in the Beauty of the World.

TO US

IT is old, old, the wisdom of the long ago,—

'Thousands of years, thousands of years,

If all were told.'

Is it wholly unwise, wholly the fantasy of a dreamer, to insist in this late day when the dust of ages and the mists of the present hide from us the Beauty of the World, that we can regain our birthright only by leaving our cloud-palaces of the brain, and becoming consciously at one with the cosmic life of



which, merely as men, we are no more than a perpetual phosphorescence?

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We are so apt to lose the old delight in familiar humble things. So apt to ignore what is by the way, just because it is by the way. . . . Beauty has only to be perceptible to give an immediate joy, and it is no paradoxical extravagance to say that one may receive the thrilling communication from 'the little flame of God' by the homely roadside as well as from those leaning towers built of air and water which a mysterious alchemy reveals to us on the cloudy deserts of heaven.

To see the bright sun-sweet face of the dandelion once more—an dealan Dhé, the little flame of God, what a joy this is. It comes into the grass like a sun-

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ray. Often before the new green is in the blade it flaunts its bright laughter in the sere bent. It will lie in ditches and stare at the sun. It will climb broken walls, and lean from nooks and corners. It will come close to the sands and rocks, sometimes will even join company with the sea-pink, though it cannot find footing where later the bindweed and the horned poppy, those children of the seawind who love to be near and yet shrink from the spray of the salt wave, defy wind and rain. It is worthier the name 'Traveller's Joy' than the wild clematis of the autumnal hedgerows; for its bright yellow leaps at one from the roadside like a smile, and its homeliness is pleasant as the gladness of playing children

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GRASS is as universal as dew, as commonplace as light... It is of all the sign-

W.

ature of Nature that which to us is nearest and homeliest... everywhere and ever has this omnipresent herb, that withereth and yet is continually reborn, been the eternal symbol of that which passes like a dream, the symbol of everlasting illusion, and yet, too, is the symbol of resurrection, of all the old divine illusion essayed anew, of the inexplicable mystery of life recovered and everlastingly perpetuated.

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AND, to-day, with a wind of the south coming across glad water, and greenness uplifting itself from the grass to the foam of leaves on swaying elms, I realise in truth how small is the measure of beauty that any can give, saying 'I have gathered this.' Yonder yellow butterfly hovering over the grass-hid nest of the shrew-mouse... I think of it as a living

flower of the sun, earth-wafted, wondering at the creature of the sod: but how poor that is compared with the excelling simplicity of the unknown peasant who, longago, tenderly called the shrewmouse an dallag fheoir, the little blind one of the grass, and the butterfly dealan Dhé, the little flame of God. The one is the beauty of fantasy, the other is the beauty of a child's mind matured in joy. And so it is with Beauty. We dwell on this loveliness, or on that: and some white one, flame-tinged, passes us on the way, saying, 'It is Loveliness I seek, not lovely things.'



Arsunrise hecame upon the old man, standing looking seaward with his bonnet removed from his long white locks; and upon his speaking to Seumas (when he saw he was not 'at his prayers') was answered, 'Every morning like this I 163

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take off my hat to the beauty of the world.'

THE little green world, he said, this little whirling star, is held to all the stars that be, and these are held to every universe, and all universes surmised and yet undreamed of are held to God Himself, simply by a little beam of light—a little beam of Love. It is Love that is the following Thought of God. And it is Love that is of sole worthin human life.

As the moon sometimes is seen rising out of the east and sometimes, as now, is first seen in the west, so is the heart of love. And if I go west, lo, the moon may rise along the sun-way; and if I go east, lo, the moon may be a white light over the setting sun. And who that knoweth the heart of man or woman can tell when

the moon of love is to appear full-orbed in the east, or sickle-wise in the west.

20.

I would that the birds of Angus Ogue might, for once, be changed, not into the kisses of love, but into doves of peace; that they might fly forth into the green world, and be nested there awhile, crooning their incommunicable song that would yet bring joy and hope.

Strange that the beauty of a single thought can thenceforth clothe the desolation in loveliness, and change the grey air and the grey sea and the grey face of a seared land into a sanctuary of peace, as though unknown birds builded there, doves of the spirit. I remember, once, on the waste of Subasio behind Assisi, that some one near me said that barrenness was terrible, more lifeless 165

and sad than any other solitude. To me, at that moment, as it happened, this was not so: the hill glowed with the divine light, that came not from the east welling it or the west gathering it, but from the immortal life of the heart of St Francis—and a storm of white doves rose with flashing wings, so that I was dazzled: and only when I saw that they were not there did I know I had seen the prayers and joy of a multitude of hearts, children of him to whom the wind was 'brother' and the grass 'sister.'

GLAD am I that wherever and whenever I listen intently I can hear the looms of Nature weaving Beauty and Music. But some of the most beautiful things are learned otherwise—by hazard, in the Way of Pain, or at the Gate of Sorrow.

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IT is true that pain is a wind that goes deep into the obscure wood, and stirs many whispers and lamentations among the hidden leaves, and sends threnodies on long waves from the swaying green shores of oak and pine and beech.... It is not natural for anything that lives to know despair. So while despair may have its beauty, as a desolate polar sea has its own desolate beauty, or as a barren hillside without green of grass or song of bird may have a wild and barren beauty, it is the beauty of what redeems-light and cloud, mist and shadow and air-not a beauty inherent, not the beauty of those things which fundamentally are elemental and eternal. The clouds of man's hopes and dreams which drift through the human sky, and the wind of the spirit which shepherds them, belong to the higher regions.

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The night-wind rose out of the west. In the vastness of shadowy gloom over sea and land it moved like a lamenting voice, a creature blind and without form, homeless, seeking what is not to be found; crying sometimes, as a lance slanting on the wind, an ancient sorrow; deepening sometimes in an immense, gathering, multitudinous sound, as though the tides of night broke against the shores of the stars.



In among the trees were oases of a solemn silence, filled only at intervals with a single flute-like wind-eddy, falling there as the song of a child lost and baffled in a waste place.

Over and above the noise of the sea was a hoarse cry thridding it as a flying shuttle in a gigantic loom. This was the wind, which continuously swept from wave to wave, shrewd, salt, bitter with

the sterile breath of the wilderness whereonit roamed, crying and moaning insatiate.

Thesea-fowl, congregating from a far, had swarmed inland. Their wailing cries filled the spray-wet obscurities. The blackness that comes before the deepest dark lay in the hollow of the great wings of the tempest. Peace nowhere prevailed, for in those abysmal depths where the wind was not even a whisper, there was listless gloom only, because no strife is there, and no dream lives amid those silent apathies.



THE wind reached the forest before the first lances of the sunlight had thrust themselves through the umbrage at its higher end. He heard it lifting the still air of the pine glooms with its vast wings, and beating it to and fro, sending volleys of fragrant breath from swaying 169



tree-top to tree-top. It wandered nearer and nearer: at first overhead, so that only the summits of the pines swayed southward, but soon it came leaping and blithely laughing through the long aisles of the forest. The indescribable rumour of the sun-flood followed. As the old Celtic poets tell us, the noise of the sun-fire on the waves at daybreak is audible for those who have ears to hear. So may be heard the sudden rush and sweep of the sunbeams when they first stream upon a wood. The boughs, the branches, the feathery or plume-like summits of the trees do homage at that moment, when the Gates of Wonder open for a few seconds on the unceasing miracle of Creation. The leaves quiver, or curl upward, even though there be no breath of air. It is then that crows, rooks, wooddoves, and, on the heights, the hawks and eagles, lean their breasts against the sun-flood and soar far forward and

downward on wide-poised motionless wings.

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In the dim, fragrant May-gloom there seemed nothing astir save white moths which flickered from bush to bush.... The remoter dusk was full of the voices of the wind, but those distantariel sounds were as the wings that fan the courts of Silence.

Shadow after shadow moved out of the twilight: soft velvetythings, though intangible, that lay drowsily upon the boughs of the pines, or slipped after each other through the intricacies of the fern.

Round the pool were many of those lovely silent children of the dusk. Dim scores were massed under the branches, or crept among the willows. Some hung from the sprays of the birches, peering into the ominous blackness of the water underneath. Others, straight and intent,



or all tremulous and wavering, stood among the reeds, the most sensitive of which had still a vague breath of sound. Many of these merged into the pool, but their ranks never thinned. By every reed stood a shadow intent, inclined before a wind that blew not. Of all that passed into the water not one reached the star that gleamed and moved, and seemed to lift and fall in the heart of the pool. Not one crossed the faintly luminous semicircle that lay upon the surface. Each sank down, down, till the star in the depths shone far above.

W W

Towards dawn a great wind arose. The hills heard, and the moan of them wentup before it. The mountains awoke, and were filled with a sound of rejoicing.

Through the darkness that lightened momently it came down the glens and the dim braes of bracken. Many waters felt the breath of it, and leaped.

... But as dawn broke wanly upon the tallest trees, the wings of the tempest struck one and all into a mighty roar, reverberatingly prolonged: a solemn, slow-sounding anthem, full of the awe of the Night, and of the majesty of the Day, hymning mysteries older than the firstdawn, deeper than the deepestdark.

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ALL the sweet loveliness of a late spring remained, to give a freshness to the glory of summer. The birds had song to them still.

Through the whole island went a rapid trickling sound, most sweet to hear: the myriad voice of twittering birds, from the dotterel in the seaweed to the larks climbing the blue spirals of heaven.

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THE spiritual secret of our delight in the joyousness of the lark's song, or in that of mavis or merle, is because the

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swift music is a rapture transcending human utterance.

30 Joy, the poet tells us, is the Mother of Spring, and of Joy has it not been said that there is no more ancient God? What fitter symbol for this divine uplift of the yearthan this bird whose ecstasy in song makes the very word Spring an intoxication in our ears? We have a Gaelic legend that the first word of God spoken to the world became a lark . . . the eternal joy translated into a moment's ecstasy. It is but a symbol of the divine joy which is Life: that most ancient Breath. that Spirit whose least thought is Creation, whose least motion is Beauty, whose least glance is that eternal miracle which we, seeing dimly and in the rhythmic rise of the long cadence of the hours, call by a word of out-welling, of measureless effluence, the Spring.

How often the wild-rose has moved in first-flame along the skirts of hornbeam hedge or beech-thicket, or the honey-suckle began to unwind her pale horns of ivory and moongold, and yet across the furthest elm-tops to the south the magic summons of the cuckoo has been still unheard in the windless amberdawn, or when, as in the poet's tale, the myriad little hands of Twilight pull the shadows out of the leaves and weave the evening dark. But when the cryof the plover is abroad we know that our welcome Spring is come at last.



As for many of us, surely the plover is the bird of our love. The cry of the curlew on the hill, the wail of the lapwing in waste places, have not these something of the same enthralling spell, the same entrancing call—the summons to the wilderness, whether that be only to soli-

tude, or to wild loneliness, or to the lonelier solitudes, the dim limitless wilderness of the imagination—that the wind has, at night, coming with rain through woods, or that the sea has heard in inland hollows, or when athwart a long shore oramong fallen rocks the tide rises on the breast-swell of coming storm? They call us to the wild.

AS OF

The elemental gods are ever triune: and in the human heart, in whose lost Eden an ancient tree of knowledge grows, where from the mind has not yet gathered more than a few windfalls, it is surely sooth that Death and Love are oftentimes one and the same, and that they love to come to us in the apparel of Spring.

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It is in the woods that the miracle of Spring may be more intimately seen.









The Presence perchance is not universallyabroadsomuch as immediately evident. A hand touched that larch yonder: for why is it so suddenly green, with a greenness as of a sea-wave, or as the wet emerald crystal one finds on the sands of Iona, or rather, with the softer, moister, the indescribable greenness of the rainbow's breast? A foot leaned upon the moss beneath that vast oak, on whose southern slopes the russet leaves still hang like a multitude of batsalong dark ragged cliffs: for why has the cyclamen suddenly burned in a faint flame, there; why has the sky suddenly come up through the moss, in that maze of speedwells? Whorose, yonder, and passed like aphantom westward? Some one, surely, of the divine race, for the tips of the sycamore-boughs have suddenly burned with a bronze-hued fire. Who went suddenly down that mysterious alley of dim columnar pines, stirring the untrodden

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silent ways? For, look, the air is full of delicate golden dust. The wind-wooer has whispered, and the pinetree has loved, and the seed of the forests to come floats like summer dust along the aerial highways.

The same same

The fragrance of the forest intoxicated him. Spring was come indeed. This wild storm had ruined nothing, for at its fiercest it had swept overhead; and on the morrow the virginal green world would be more beautiful than ever. Everywhere the green fire of Spring would be litten anew. A green flame would pass from meadow to hedgerow, from hedgerow to the tangled thickets of bramble and dog-rose, from the underwoods to the inmost forest glades. Everywhere song would be to the birds, everywhere young life would pulse, everywhere the rhythm of a new rapture would run re-

joicing. The miracle of Spring would be accomplished in the sight of all men, of all birds and beasts, of all green life.

Whenever this green fire is come upon the earth, the swift contagion spreads to the human heart. What the seedlings feel in the brown mould, what the sap feels in the trees, what the blood feels in every creature from the newt in the pool to the nesting-bird, so feels the strange remembering ichor that runs its red tides through human hearts and brains. Spring has its subtler magic for us, because of the dim mysteries of unremembering remembrance and of the vague radiances of hope. Something in ussings an ascendant song, and we expect we know not what: something in us sings a decrescent song, and we realise vaguely the stirring of immemorial memories.

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THE first day of June came clad in the fulness of summer. Sea and land seemed as though they had been immersed in that Fount of Life which wells from the hollow of the Hand which upholdeth Tir-na-h'Oighe, the isle of eternal youth.

Who knows where its tributaries are? They may be in your heart, or in mine, and in a myriad others.

W W

How often I have thought of that most precious treasure you found in the heather, when the bells were sweet with honey-ooze! Did the wild bees know of it? Would that I could hear the soft hum of their gauzy wings.

Who of us would not barter the best of all our possessions—and some there are who would surrender all—to have one touch laid upon the eyelids—one touch of the Fairy Ointment? But the

place is far, and the hour is hidden. No man may seek that for which there can be no quest.

Only the wild bees know of it; but I think they must be the bees of Magh-Mell. And there no man that liveth may wayfare—yet.

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The foam of the White Tide of blossoms has been flung across the land. It is already ebbing from the blackthorn hedges; the wild-cherry herself is no longer so immaculately snow-white. It drifts on the wind that has wooed the wild-apple. The plum is like a reef swept with surf. Has not the laurustinus long been as cream-dappled as, later, the elder will be in every hedgerow or green lane or cottage-garden? Not that all the tides of blossom are like fallen snow: is not the apple-bloom itself flushed with the hearts of roses? Think of

the flowering almond, that cloud of shell-heart pink: of the delicate bloom of the peach that lives on the south wind: of the green-gold of the sallow catkins: of the blazing yellow of the gorse: of the homely flowering-currant, which even by mid-March had hung out her gay tangle of pinky blooms. . . . The brown bees have long discovered this flusht Eden; their drowsily sweet murmurous drone is as continuous as though these slow-swaying pastures were of linden-bloom, and the hour the heart of summer.

so so

The dew is heavy on the grass: the corncrake calls; on a cloudy juniper the nightjar churrs: the fhionna or white moth wavers above the tall spires of the foxglove. The midsummer eve is now a grey-violet dusk. At the rising of the moona sigh comes from the earth. Down

the moist velvety ledges of the dark a few far apart and low-set stars pulsate as though about to fall, but continuously regather their tremulous white rays. The night of summer is come.

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For sure, there is sometimes in the quiet beauty of summer an air of menace, a premonition of suspended forceaforce antagonistic and terrible. All who have lived in these lonely isles know the peculiar intensity of this summer melancholy. No clamour of tempestuous wind, no prolonged season of untimely rains, no long baffling of mists in all the drear inclemencies of that remote region, can produce the same ominous and even paralysing gloom sometimes born of ineffable peace and beauty. Is it that in the human soul there is mysterious kinship with the outer soul which we call Nature; and that in these few supreme 183

hours which come at the full of the year, we are, sometimes, suddenly aware of the tremendous forces beneath and behind us, momently quiescent?

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The morning twilight wavered, and it was as though an incalculable host of grey doves flew upward and spread earthward before a wind with pinions of rose: then the dappled dove-grey vapour faded, and the rose hung like the reflection of crimson fire, and dark isles of ruby and straits of amethyst and pale gold and saffron and April-green came into being: and the new day was come.

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Dawn broke upon the eastern hills. Slowly the light travelled downward beyond the crests of the mountains. It reached the forest and spread an unshimmering sheen over it, like the silver calm

on a green sea. Then, out of the sky a marvellous flower grew. It was dusky, rosy grey at first, as it lifted through the blue-black heaven, already steel-blue in the east. Green folds of pink uncurled andfell languidly on each side: drooping petals. There was a stir and quiver; then a shaft of gold, another, and another. Suddenly it was as though the heart of the flower burst. In the yellow mist and radiance, wherefrom tall, waving foliage of golden fire moved as though fanned by a wind from within, a cloud of glowing flakes arose. . . . Then the golden heart of the miracle swelled, with a mighty suspiration. Petals of rose and gold-green and pale-pink as of shells unclosed from it. The vast blue flower was aureoled now with an ascendant glory. . . . An indescribable fragrance, an almost inaudible rustling soundfaint, as the roar of the rushing world is faint beyond all ears to hear-filled the 185

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air. The pulse of the world quickened. The green earth sighed, and was awake.

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THE foreheads of the hills were bathed in light.... The lyric rapture of the

ed in light. . . . The lyric rapture of the morning made a sound of rejoicing.

The glory of the newday came soundlessly. Peace was in the blue heaven, on the blue-green sea, on the green land. There was no wind, even where the currents of the deep moved in shadowy purple. The sea itself was silent, making no more than a sighing slumber-breath round the white sands of the isle, or a hushed whisper where the tide lifted the long weed that clung to the rocks.

It is a great destiny to raise thrones and win dominions and build kingly

cities. But cities can be ground into dust, and dominions can be as palaces built upon the sea, and the highest throne can become as the last yellow leaf shaken in the winds of autumn. But great beauty... that is a memory for ever.... It endures, that immortal memory, that immortal dream. It is whispered and told and communicated in every Spring. It is on every wind of the west.

The woods at the end of October were, other than the pine-forests, a blaze of glory. Few leaves had fallen, except from the limes and sycamores, and these sparsely only . . . scarce enough to lay a pathway of flakes of yellow gold before the hinds and fawns that trooped through the sunlit glades. The innumerable rowan-trees wore fiery hues upon their feathery foliage: everywhere the scarlet berries suspended in blood-red 187

clusters against the blue sky or the cool greenness. The dream, the spell, was not only upon the beautiful green earth. It lay elsewhere than there, or in the deeps of heaven; elsewhere than on the quiet waters which slept against the shores beyond the mountains and slumbered immeasurably towards the ever-receding west, with a soft moaning only, wonderful and sweet to hear. For it was upon the heart and in the brain of each of the mountaineers of Iolair.

an an an

To go through those winter aisles of the forest is to know an elation foreign to the melancholy of November or to the first fall of the leaf. It is not the elation of certain days in February, when the storm-cock tosses his song among thewildreefs of naked bough and branch. It is not the elation of March, when a blueness haunts the myriad unburst

buds, and the throstle builds her nest and calls to the South. It is not the elation of April, when the virginal green is like exquisite music of life in miraculous suspense, nor the elation of May, when the wild rose moves in soft flame upon the thickets and the returned magic of the cuckoo is an intoxication, nor the elation of June, when the merle above the honeysuckle and the cushat in the green-glooms fill the hot noons with joy, and when the long fragrant twilights are thrilled with the passion of the nightjar. It has not this rapture nor that delight; but its elation is an ecstasy that is its own. It is then that one understands as one has never understood. It is then that one loves the mystery one has but fugitively divined. Where the forest murmurs there is music: ancient, everlasting.



WINTER had not only whitened the hillmoors but dusted the green roofs of every strath and corrie. To the hill-born it is a call as potent as any that can put the bitter-sweet ache into longing hearts. Thereis peace there: and silence is there: and, withal, a beauty that is not like any other beauty. The air and wind are auxiliary; every cloud or mist-drift lends itself to the ineffable conspiracy; the polar breath itself is a weaver of continual loveliness often more exquisitely delicate than the harebell, often incalculable or immeasurable, or beautiful with strangeness, as moonlight on great waters, or the solitary torch of Jupiter burning his cold flame in the heart of a mountain-tarn. There is no soundlessness like it.

THERE was no wind, so the flakes fell light as feathers, grey in the gathering

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dusk as the down that falls from windswept breasts of wild swans in their flight to or from the Polar seas.

Denserand denser it came, soundless at first, but after a while with a faint rustling and whirring, as though the flakes were wings of invisible birds of silence.

so so

This at least we know, that as the winter-tide, the death-tide, eternally recurs, so is the foam-white Dream continually rewoven, so everlastingly does Spring come again in the green garment that is the symbol of immortality and wearing the white coronals of blossom which stand for the soul's inalienable hope, for the spirit's incalculable joy.

SS SS SS

Our wise nerves that were attuned long, long ago, and play to us a march

against the light, or down into the dark, and we unwitting, and not knowing the ancient rune of the heritage that the blood sings, an ancient, ancient song. Who plays the tune to which our dancing feet are led? it is behind the mist, that antique strain to which the hills rose in flame and marl, and froze slowly into granite silence, and to which the soul of man crept from the things of the slime to the palaces of the brain. It is for the hearing, that: in the shells of the human. Who knows the under-song of the tides in the obscure avenues of the sea? Who knows the old immemorial tidal-murmur along the nerves—along the nerves even of a new-born child?

as as

FLow and ebb, ebb and flow . . . it is that ancient inexplicable mystery, the everlasting and unchanging rhythm which holds star to star in infinite pro-









cession, which lifts and lowers the poles of our sun-wheeling world, which compels the great oceans to arise and follow the mysterious bidding of the moon. It is wonderful that the moontravels along the equator at the rate of a thousand miles an hour: but more wonderful that these loose, formless, blind and insensate waters should awake at the touch of that pale hand, should move to it and follow it as the flocks of the hills to the voice of the shepherd.

Flow and ebb, ebb and flow . . . it is the utterance of the divine law, the eternal word of Order. It is life itself. What life is there, from the phosphorescent atom in the running wave to the enfranchised soul stepping westward beyond the twilights of time, that is not subject to this ineffable rhythmic law? The tides of the world, the tides of life: the grey sap, the red blood, the secret dews, the tameless seas, birthanddeath, the noons

193 N

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and midnights of the mind of man, the evening dusk and the morning glory of the soul... one and all move inevitably, and in one way; in one way come, and go, and come again.

'But as to where the tides come from, and where they go, there will be none in all the world who can tell that; no, not one. They will be just like the wind, that no one knows the road of, behind or before. Ay, the sea's just like the grey road: the green road an' the grey road, they show no tracks. The wind an' the tides, they just come an' they just go. "Blindas the wind," "blindas the tide"... ay, it may be; but not so blind as we are, for they know their way, an' brightest noon an' darkest night, an' summer an' winter, an' calm an' storm, are one and the same to them.

130

THEN there is that miraculous halt, when the cold hand of the tide can reach no further: when at a boat's helm a curl of dark brackish water will indolently lapse, while at the prow the clear brown rippling rush will be fresh with gathered rains and dews and the unsullied issues of wellsprings and sunlit sources. ... Of a sudden those little shallows in the sands, those little weed-hung pools below slippery rocks covered with mussel and dog-whelk, shiver. A faint undulation thrills the still small world. A shrimp darts from a sand-mound: a blood-red anemone thrusts out feathered antennæ: nowone, nowanothershellfish stirs, lifts, gapes. It is the response of the obscure, the insignificant, and the silent, to that mighty incalculable force which is hastening from the fathomless depths and across countless leagues of the great Sea. Soon the flood will come: perhaps in furtive swiftness and silence,

perhaps with a confused multitudinous noise among which are inchoate cries and fragmentary bewildering echoes of muffled songs and chants, perhaps as in charging hordes of wild sea-horses where the riders are not seen in the dazzle of spray, nor their shouting heard in the tumult of wave dashed against wave and billow hurled on billow.

W W

THE Sea . . . the very words have magic. It is like the sound of a horn in woods, like the sound of a bugle in the dusk, like the cry of wind leaping the long bastions of silence. To many of us there is no call like it, no other such clarion of gladness.

W W W

Oceanward the sea-horses swept onward magnificently, champing and whirling white foam about their green

flanks, and tossing on high their manes of sunlit rainbow gold, dazzling-white and multitudinous far as sight could reach.

Clamour of gulls, noise of waves, lisp and chime and flute-call of the shallows among the rock-holes and upon the whispering tongues of the sea-weed what joy, and stir, and breath of life!

w w

I AM alone between sea and sky, for there is no other on this bouldered height, nothing visible but a single blue shadow that slowly sails the hillside.... Allroundtheislandthereis a continuous breathing; deeper and more prolonged on the west, where the open sea is; but audible everywhere... In the sun blaze, the waters of the Sound dance their blue bodies and swirl their flashing white hair o' foam; and, as I look, they seem to me like children of the wind and sun-

shine, leaping and running in these flowing pastures, with a laughter as sweet against the ears as the voices of children at play. The joy of life vibrates everywhere.

W W

It is this exquisite miracle of transparency which gives the last secret of beauty to water.... Think if the grass, if the leaves of the tree, if the rose and the iris and the pale horns of the honeysuckle, if the great mountains built of grey steeps of granite and massed purple of shadow were thus luminous, thus transparent! Think if they, too, as the sea, could reflect the passage of saffronsailed and rose-flusht argosies of cloud, ormirrorasin the calms of ocean the multitudinous undulation of the blue sky! This divine translucency is but a part of the Sea-Spell, which holds us from childhood to old age in wonder and delight,

but that part is its secret joy, its incommunicable charm.

en en en

MEN and women who are born to the noise of the sea, whose cradles have rocked to the surge or croon of the tides, who have looked on the deep every day in every season of every year, could not but feel towards the barest hills, as a forester feels for the most sombre woods, as the seed-sower and the harrower feel for monotonous brownlands which swell upward until they bear the rounded white clouds like vast phantom flowers. In this sense they love it, and truly.

WE followed the course of a brown torrent, and soon were under the shadow of a mountain. The ewes and lambs made incessantly that mournful crying, which in mountain solitudes falls from ledge to 199

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ledge as though it were no other than the ancient sorrow of the hills.

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Does not the very mention of torrent and cataract and waterfall evoke happy memories? One can hear the tumultuous surge between heather-held banks, and see the rock-rooted bracken shake with the ceaseless spray: can see the wildleap and foaming collapse, so habitual, so orderly in disorder, that the ringousel flies heedlessly from her fragile eggs which a handful of this whirling water would crushandsweep away:can recall, as indreams themindrebuilds thephantoms of natural imagery, the long, white, wavering smoke down the sheer slope of some mountain bastion, or the filmy yet motionless veils of delicate gauze hung high on the breasts of silent and remote hills.

The human heart is like a wave of the sea: it can be lashed into storm, it can be calmed, it can become stagnant—but it is seldom absorbed from the ocean till in natural course the sun takes up its spirit in vapour. Yet, ever and again, there is one wave among a myriad which a spiral wind-eddy may suddenly strike. In a moment it is whirled this way and that: it is involved in a cataclysm of waters: and then cloud and sea meet, and what a moment before had been an ocean-wave is become an idle skyey vapour.

No sound came from the isle. The noise of the falling stream in the glen was merged in the confused clamour of the tide-race. Shoreward, there was that awful tidal whisper. Seaward, themarch of wave after wave, of billow after billow, in vast processional array; squad 201



ron after squadron, battalion after battalion, of the innumerable army of the deep:andamong them all, over them all, beneath them all, a Voice, loud, reverberant, menacing, awful as brooding thunder, terrible as the quaking of the dry land when the hills o'er-topple the cities of the plains: a Voice as of the majesty of Death, swelling through the night with all the eternal pain, the forlorn travail, the incommunicable ache of all the weary, weary World.



How vast and grey and illimitable seemed the long machar, how vaster and sadder and more illimitable the sea beyond, how vast and shadowy the inland hills. The lifting of a Hand, nay but the least breath of the Unknowable, and these hills would be as blown dust, and the machar as a handful of ground sand, and the great sea no more than a cup of

water spilt and thrown upon the wind. How futile all human longing, all passion of the heart, all travail of the spirit, beside this terrible reality of wind and vastness, of wind baying like a hound in a wilderness—a wilderness where the hound's voice would fall away at last, and the hound's shadow fade, and infinitude and eternity be beyond and above and behind and beneath.

The shimmering sea beat to a rhythm atune to a larger throb than that of a petty human life. In the starry infinitude her infinitude was lost, absorbed, as a grain of sand wind-blown a few yards across an illimitable desert.

TO TO THE

ONE by one the stars came forth—solemn eyes watching for everthewhite procession move onward orderly where 203

there is neither height, nor depth, nor beginning, nor end.

In the vast stellar space the moonglow waned until it grew cold, white, ineffably remote. Only upon our little dusky earth, upon our restless span of waters, the light descended in a tender warmth. Drifting upon the sea, it moved tremulously onward, weaving the dark waters into a weft of living beauty.

THE world without wonder, the world without mystery! That indeed is the rainbow without colours, the sunrise without living gold, the noon void of light.

as as

FOR two or three fathoms beyond the boat the waters were blue. If blueness can be alive and have its own life and movement, it must be happy on these

western seas, where it dreams into shadowy Lethes of amethyst and deep, dark oblivious of violet!

SO SO SO

When, in the change of the days, the hyacinths spilt their blue wave into the rising green of the fern, and the birds ceased singing their lovely aerial songs, the king no longer grieved, for now he knew that what was beautiful would not perish but drift from change to change.

30 30

OF what avail to speak when there is nothing to besaid? God sends the gloom upon the cloud, and there is rain: God sends the gloom upon the hill, and there is mist: God sends the gloom upon the sun, and there is winter. It is God, too, sends the gloom upon the soul, and there is change.

IT is God that builds the nest of the blind bird. I know not when or where I heard that said, if ever I heard it, but it has been near me as a breast-feather to a bird's heart since I was a child. When I ponder it, I say to myself that it is God also who guides sunrise and moonrise into obscure hearts, to build, with those winged spirits of light, a nest for the blind soul.

100 ME 100

Who builds these perfected dreams?

—I do not mean the dreams which one controls, as the wind herds the clouds which rise from the sea-horizons: but the dreams which come unawares, as, when one is lying on the grass and idly thinking, there may appear in the passing of a moment the shadow of a hawk hovering unseen. . . . Strange imaginations arise, as birds winged with flame and with heads like flowers: the un-

known is become familiar. When not an image is made by that subtle artificer within; when not a thought steals out to whisper or to shape; when the mind is as a hushed child in the cradle, hearing a new and deep music and unknowing the sea, listening to a lullaby beyond the mother-song and unknowing the wind ... who, then, fashions those palaces upon the sea, those walls of green ice among the rose garths of June, those phantoms of bright flame sleeping in peace among drygrass or moving under ancient trees of the unfalling branch and the unfading leaf?

as as

AND is there not also a Winged Destiny, a Creature of the Eternal, inhabiting infinitude, so vast and incommensurable that no eye can perceive, no imagination limn, no thought overtake, and yet that can descend as dew upon 207

blades of grass, as wind among the multitudinous leaves, as the voice of sea and forest that can rise to the silence of mountain-brows or sink in whispers through the silence of a child's sleep?—
a Destiny that has no concern with crowns and empires and the proud dreams of men, but only with the soul, that flitting shadow, more intangible than dew, yet whose breath shall see the wasting of hills and the drought of oceans.

a a

With him, the peopled solitude of night was a concourse of confirming voices. He did not dread the silence of the stars, the cold remoteness of the stellar fire.... In the vast majestic order of that nocturnal march, that diurnal retreat, he had learned the law of the whirling leaf and the falling star, of the slow æon-delayed comet and of the slower wane of

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solar fires. Looking with visionary eyes into that congregation of stars, he realised, not the littleness of the human dream but its divine impulsion.

as as

He looked out upon the vast and solemn congregation of the stars before he slept that night: star beyond star, planet beyond planet, strange worlds all, immutably controlled, unrelinquished day or night, age or æon, shepherded among the infinite deeps, moving orderly from a dawn a million years far off to a quiet fold a million years away, sheep shepherded beyond all change or chance, or no more than the dust of a great wind blowing behind the travelling feet of Eternity—what did it all mean? Shepherded starry worlds, or but the dust of Time? A Shepherd, or silence?

209 0

It is we of the human clan only who are troubled by the vast waste and refuse of life. There is not any such waste, neither in the myriad spawn nor the myriad seed: a Spirit sows by a law we do not see, and reaps by a law we do not know.... There are mysteries of which I cannot write; not from any occult secret, but because they are so simple and inevitable, that, like the mystery of day and night, or the change of the seasons, or life and death, they must be learned by each, in his own way, in his own hour. It is out of their light that I see; it is by these stars that I set forth, where else I should be as a shadow upon a trackless waste.

THERE is also the romance of the stars, as well as that deeper and perturbing romance which is disclosed to us in the revelations of science. That sense of

794

incalculable distances, of immeasurable periods, of unknown destinies and amazing arrivals, which haunts the imagination of the astronomer when he looks beyond the frontiers of ascertained knowledge, half-doubting perhaps whether even that be not a terrible illusory logic, is also here. One goes back, as in thought one recedes into the beautiful, impassioned wonderland of childhood. One seems to see mankind itself as a child, gone but a little way even yet, looking up trustfully or fearfully to the mysterious mother-eyes of a Face it cannot rightly discern, in its breath being Immortality, Eternity in its glance, and on its brows Infinitude.

a a a

For nothing is more strange than the life of natural symbols. We may discern in them a new illusion, a new meaning. The Symbol of the Lily has been the



chalice of the world's tears; the symbol of the Rose, the passion of uplifted hearts and of hearts on fire; in the symbol of the Cross has dwelled, like fragrance in a flower, the human Soul. The salt, mutable, and yet unchanging sea has been the phantom in which empires have seen Time like a shadow, the mirage by which kings have wept and nations been amorous in a great pride. The Wind, that no man has seen, on whose rushing mane no hand has been laid, and in whose mouth has been set no bridle since the world swung out of chaos on chariots of flame, . . . has not that solitary and dread creature of the deeps been fashioned in our minds to an image of the Everlasting, and in our hearts been shaped to the semblance of a Spirit?

WITH each note the years of Time ran laughing through ancient woods,

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and old age sighed across the world and sank into the earth, and the sea moaned with the burden of all moaning and tears. The stars moved in a jocund measure; a player sat among them and played, the moon his footstool and the sun a flaming gem above his brows. The song was Youth.

W W

There is not a hidden glen among the lost hills, there is not an unvisited shore, there is not a city swathed in smoke and drowned in many clamours, where light is not a continual miracle, where from dayset to dawn, from the rising of the blue to the gathering of shadow, the wind is not habitual as are the reinless, fierce, unswerving tides of the sea. Beauty, and Light, and Wind: they who are so common in our companionship and so continual in mystery, are as one in this—that none knows whence



the one or the other is come, or where any has the last excellence or differs save in the vibration of ecstasy, or whither the one or the other is gone, when the moment, on whose wings it came or on whose brows it stood revealed, is no longer Eternity speaking the language of Time, but the silence of what is already timeless and no more.

TO SE SE

Who is that Artificer who has subtly and diversely hidden the secret of rhythm in the lichen of the rock and in the rock's heart itself; in the frost-flower, so perfect in beauty that a sunbeam breathes it away; in the falling star, a snow-flake in the abyss, yet with the miraculous curve in flight which the wave has had, which the bent poplar has had, which the rainbow has had, since the world began? The grey immemorial stone and the vanishing meteor are one.

Both are the offspring of the Eternal Passion, and it may be that between the æon of the one and the less than a minute of the other there shall not, in the divinereckoning, bemorethanthethrob of a pulse. For who of us can measure even Time, that the gnat measures as well as we, or the eagle, or the ancient yew, or the mountain whose granite brows are white with ages-much less Eternity, wherein Time is but a vanishing pulse?

> 300 30

For now I see clearly that the chief end of the body is to enable the soul to come into intimate union with the natural law, so that it may fulfil the divine law of Form, and be at one with all created life and yet be for ever itself and individual. By itself the soul would only vainly aspire; it has to learn to remember, to become at one with the wind and

the grass and with all that lives and moves; to take its life from the root of the body, and its green life from the mind, and its flower and fragrance from what it may of itself obtain, not only from this world, but from its own dews, its own rainbows, dawn stars and evening stars, and vast incalculable fans of time and death.

ST 30

AFAR in an island-sanctuary that I shall not see again, where the wind chants the blindoblivious rune of Time, I have heard the grasses whisper: Time never was, Time is not.









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